INDIAN
FOLK BRONZES

K C ARYAN

SHOUT
SHARE
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"The folk bronzes of India form an important group of images within the vast range of Indian folk art. Shri K.C. Aryan is singularly equipped for writing on them for he has first-hand knowledge having lived, seen and collected many of the images on the spot and being himself a practising artist..."

Comments of noted Indologist
STELLA KRAMRISCH

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ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES

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K.C. ARYAN

REKHA PRAKSHAN
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Preface

Several decades ago, I was passing through the by-lanes of old Delhi one afternoon when all unawares, my wandering eye happened to get arrested by an assortment of utensils lying in a metal caster's shop. Near the utensils, my sharp searching gaze spotted tiny weird, grotesque-looking images. The metalworker was about to feed them along with the utensils into the furnace. He would then melt and redesign them. Such a sight of tradition being sacrificed for modernity sent shivers down my spine. I, a modern painter and sculptor with an appreciative eye for and awareness of the traditional, who has been collecting objects used in everyday life since my childhood, was deeply shocked. I bought all the folk images and added them to my collection of folk art objects.

With the years, my obsession and fascination with these crude bronzes grew. So did my collection. I was seized with an intense desire to write about them, publicise them and make them known to the wide world of art historians and connoisseurs who had eyes only for the classical style sculptures. As my collection of folk bronzes grew, I decided to categorize them. The numerous specimens of folk

bronzes from different provinces make a powerful impact on one and also give one an insight into their rural and tribal socio-religious-cultural life.

And in 1973, I published a book on them entitled "Folk Bronzes of North-western India", the first and the only one of its kind. Till then, these folk images had not seen the light of the day nor were they represented in any museum or private collection. No body had thought of bringing these non-classical bronzes in limelight. Other scholars came on the scene after the publication of this book which was widely acclaimed by Indian press, art lovers, scholars and art historians. Countless art lovers came to see me and my collection from within my country and abroad.

For the last fifty five years, I have been collecting these bronzes in the form of actual objects. I photographed them if I was not in a position to acquire them. I travelled extensively and in the course of my travels, I discovered that folk bronzes of one state are found in another province. Rajasthani and Gujarati bronze figurines are available in Himachal Pradesh. The same can be said about other provinces. The reason is not far to seek. They must have travelled along with pilgrims, artisans who were constantly on the move in search of patronage, fugitives, etc.

About six decades ago, modern art trends created quite a stir in the world of Indian art, consequent upon which interest in folk and tribal arts grew amongst art historians and lovers. They had known a long period of eclipse. This new awareness and general interest in the folk and the primitive revealed to the world at large the beauties of these art forms. Art lovers were fascinated by their remarkable freshness, directness and spontaneity. Gradually they discovered that these weird looking figurines deserved as significant a place as classical sculptures. Needless to say that they, like their counterparts in classical style, were created to fulfil the religious needs of the ruralfolk.

There was another reason that urged me to fight for the cause of rural arts. In my life, I have struck new grounds in several areas of knowledge. I did pioneer research in Devanagari script. The unusual, the unexplored areas attract me much more. In the course of my study of Indian art history, a reaction set in in my mind when I realised that only classical sculptures were being studied, highlighted and collected by art lovers and scholars, and the same were preserved in the museum col-

lections. No scholar nor art lover ever condescended to look at these significant folk arts. So I decided to collect folk style embroideries from Himachal Pradesh, in addition to other specimens from other provinces. I was the first to introduce the so-called Chamba rumals embroidered in folk style, while simultaneously collecting folk bronze figurines.

Since the publication of my book in 1973, which generated interest in these images, quite a few art lovers added them to their collections. This way, numerous folk images have been salvaged, while a large number has been irretrievably lost. In spite of a handful of publications on folk and primitive arts by Verrier Elwin, Ruth Reeves, Stella Kramrisch, Ajit Mookerjee and my book on the folk bronzes, these figurines still remain relatively obscure.

Ironically enough, since the publication of my book, a handful of private collectors built up collections of folk images, but not a single Indian museum has collected them so far, the sole exception being my own museum known as Home of Folk Art in Gurgaon. In the course of my extensive travels, in the villages of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, etc., I collected numerous folk images with a view to rescue this rich heritage from fading into oblivion. It is with a view to placing them on record and affording the public and posterity an opportunity of seeing them that this collection, now housed in the Home of Folk Art, was built up. I have devoted my lifetime and contributed all my time, energy and resources to salvage this unique treasure at the cost of my personal comforts and needs.

I am extremely pessimistic as to the survival and continuity of this rich rural heritage which has withstood the test of time for more than five thousand years. The materialistic culture that is fast taking over our villages is going to strangulate the spontaneity of folk expression. Withstanding this onslaught is Maharashtra, in the countryside of which a vast variety of folk images are still found. It has not been possible to include all the representative specimens from this province. Similar images are found in Madhya Pradesh which are more tribal in character, but their original charm is on the wane.

Now after a lapse of seventeen long years, I am presenting the fruits of my personal research to the lovers of folk arts, thanks to the overwhelming response of my readers! I am devoting my present study to the folk images mainly of Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, partially Mad-

hya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Of course, the greatest emphasis is on Himachal Pradesh which is relatively unknown. I wish to leave the study of the folk bronzes of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and South India to other researchers as it is not possible to do full justice to such a vast subject in the present volume.

It would not be an exaggeration to call this book "a personal record". I did not raid private or public collections for photographs which are mine for the most part. Utmost efforts have been expended on the selection of the most representative specimens of folk bronzes. The selection of folk images has also been an extremely tedious job.

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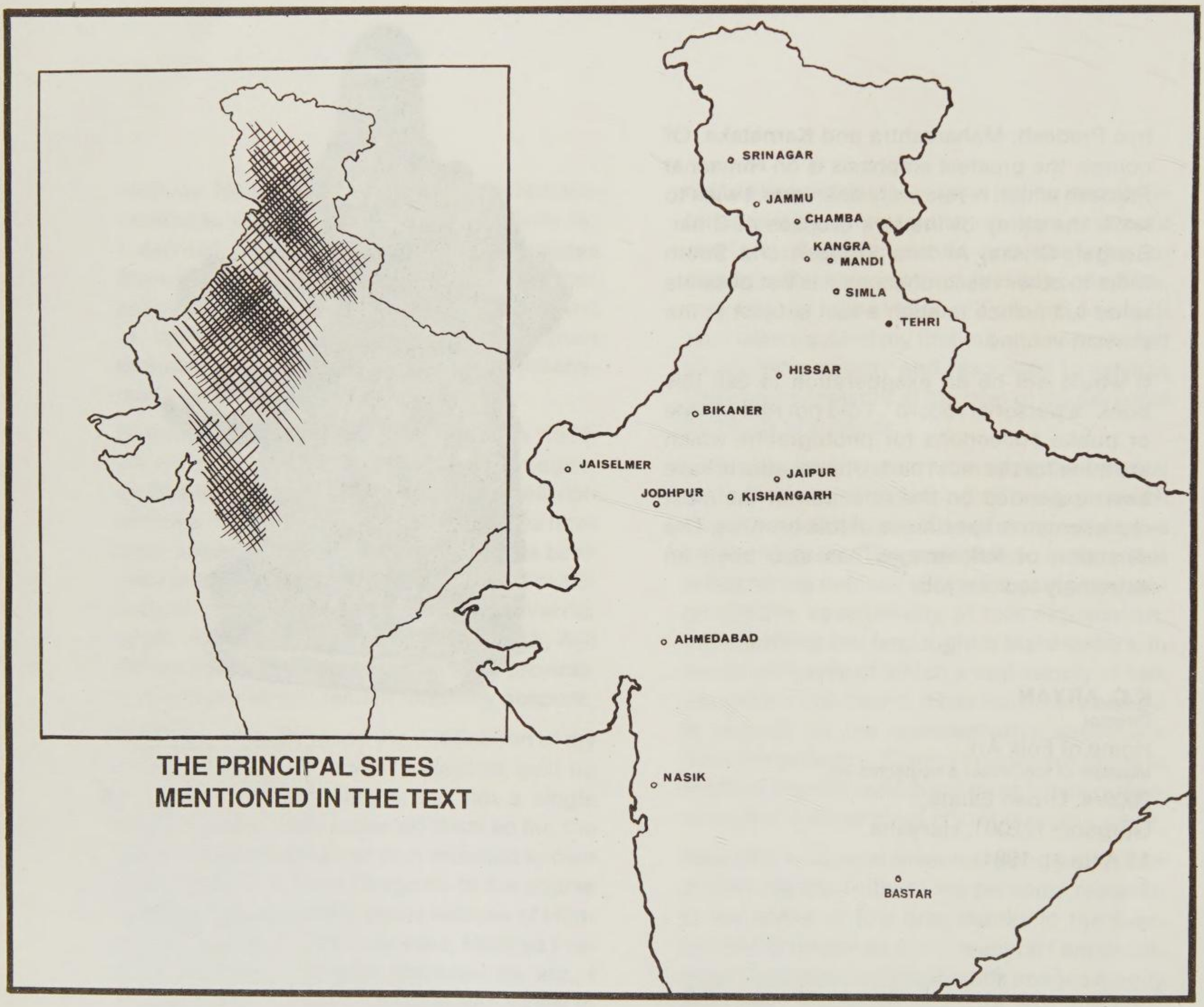
11 August, 1991.



THE PRINCIPAL SITES
MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

1. Ganesh, Himachal Pradesh, 17th century.

INTRODUCTION

The folk bronzes of India are a fascinating field of study. They were completely unknown and unexplored the until publication of my book on the subject in 1973. Until about fifteen years ago, the scholars of Indian art considered only the so-called classical arts worthy of study and collection. Folk arts were given summary treatment, if not ignored altogether. My book brought about some change in this attitude and the connoisseurs became for the first time aware of the intrinsic worth, usefulness and significance of folk bronzes in the history of Indian sculpture. It generated a great deal of interest among art historians, connoisseurs and scholars all over the world and quite a few bronzes in folk style have found their way into private and museum collections. They are also regarded as worthy objects for display in exhibitions. I am glad to note that my efforts in establishing the fact that in artistic achievements, these bronzes are coeval with classical bronzes and in some cases even surpass them have met with success. The importance of folk bronzes to a fuller appreciation of Indian art has yet to be established.

The folk bronzes are tasteful and inspiring forms which have intrinsic value and artistic merit. A prolonged association with them makes us aware of their warm and intimate vitality, their vigour and dignity, and the excitement of basic rhythms not clouded by tired, apathetic, perfunctory and rehashed stereotypes. They are a significant offshoot of folk culture which still survives in its pristine form in all the provinces of India which consist mainly of villages. Since the villages were not much perturbed by the everchanging march of time, the folk traditions succeeded in retaining their ancient characteristics and can be traced back to prehistoric times. The unswerving traditionalism of folk bronzes goes back not to fumbling beginnings but to masterpieces of the dancing girl figurine from the Indus valley site of Mohenjodaro (3500 B.C.) which still enthralls us today on account of its extraordinary plasticity.

I am confining my study of folk bronzes to North-western India. Geographically speaking, this region comprises only the Punjab and the lower portion of Kashmir. I have extended my study to a much more extensive area comprising not only Kashmir and Punjab but also Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, upto Nasik in Maharashtra. 'North-west India' may sound a misnomer to many of my readers. I shall explain why I have selected this name. The reason is that I regard all these provinces as forming a kind of cultural unit. For a study of cultural and artistic traditions, one has to ignore the political and geographical boundaries, for artistic styles are not confined within them nor affected by them. Similar art forms persisted over a wide-ranging area. This has been amply proved by the archaeological finds from Ropar in the foothills of the Shivalik ranges which have striking affinities, on the one hand, with the objets d'art excavated from Harappa in Sind and on the other hand with those discovered from the Harappan site of Lothal in Gujarat. The bronzes and art forms, for example, of Himachal Pradesh bear the stamp of Kashmiri sculptures and bronzes as well display remarkable similarities with those of Rajasthan which, in turn, influenced the art forms of Gujarat and Maharashtra, inspite of distinct physiognomic features of each province. Surprisingly enough, many art forms of the Paharis of Himachal Pradesh and the Rajputs of Rajasthan together with their rituals, customs and beliefs have a close bearing upon the fundamental character of their great ancient tradition of folk bronzes in particular and folk arts in general. The Pahari and Rajasthani ruralfolk whose keen aesthetic

awareness revealed in their personal surroundings and other aspects of life is a characteristic ethnic feature have made a valuable contribution to artistic tradition. Himachal Pradesh formed part of Punjab prior to its formation as a separate State. I have bracketed together the folk style bronzes of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, for the former State has preserved the artistic and cultural traditions of the latter. This shall be brought home to the reader in the present volume at appropriate places. It may, however, be noted that not very many folk bronzes have come down to us from Kashmir and Punjab, having succumbed to the iconoclastic zeal of the invading intruders over the centuries.

The distortions wrought by folk artists are remarkably consistent all over the region of North-west India. They are found in all forms of folk arts, for they are rude survivals of ancient art.

THE MEANING OF FOLK BRONZES

When I used the word "folk" it means something pertaining to the village. The folk bronzes are the metal images of Hindu deities used for worship in Indian villages and are enshrined in the village temple or household altar. They are fashioned by the local metalsmith who belongs to the metal-workers' community and has inherited the secrets of his trade as well as his skill from his forefathers. He is well-versed not only in the techniques of metalcraft and the traditional repertoire of artistic motifs, but also in Hindu mythology, legends, traditional folklore and the tenets of the Shilpashastra. He it is who has preserved the age-old indigenous artistic and cultural traditions over the centuries till the present times and saved them from passing into oblivion for good. Inspite of his apparent illiteracy, he is far more learned than any of the so-called literate babus who contribute nothing to life, not to speak of arts and culture.

Hereditary nature of craftsmen's occupation and the fact that they sought neither patronage nor reward were mainly responsible for the uninterrupted continuity of this tradition. The traditional forms which the metalsmith transmitted to the bronze images were prescribed by generations of practice and orthodoxy. Their concern for the proper visual presentation of religious concepts was very important. Harmony with precepts laid down by religious canons and disciplined organisation of form

absorbed the craftsman's attention. A sense of rightness in the object evolved naturally the authentic results which are seen as refreshing and genuine. Obligation to religious dictation, cultural prescriptions and patrons' requirements apart, the artisan worked undisturbed within his understanding of craft processes. He has received little prestige and profit for the work done. The satisfaction of his sense of duty has given a higher purpose to his activities. His creations display qualities of aesthetic depth, religious feeling and ethical integrity.

In some cases, the metalsmith and his aides sought the help and guidance of the local priest (Purohit) who was fully conversant with the Shilpashastra and acquainted the artisans with iconographic traits. The artisans often practised their crafts in strict conformity with their conventions handed down to them over the centuries. So the craftsmen worked age-old forms and countless recapitulations resulted in the states of mind in which they could produce the most abstract objects without any conscious efforts. And the resultant expression of this assimilative process was abstract or symbolic according to the individual talent and skill of the person who made the bronze images.

While in most cases, the metal images were cast by the traditional craftsmen, there were occasions when the village priests also tried their hands at fashioning them singly or with the aid of artisans such as potters or metalsmiths. It is well known that in very ancient times, the Hindu priests used to practise fine arts. This practice was taken over by the Buddhist monks in the monasteries and Lamaseries of Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Ladakh, Kinnaur etc. They not only fabricated images in various materials but were well versed in the art of painting and ivory carving as well.

ORIGINS

One wonders how and when the casting of folk bronzes came into being. Thousands of years ago, when the villagers were at the mercy of Nature, they channelled their desperate hopes and fears into magic rites and ceremonies which they believed would safeguard and improve their existence. The religion of the earliest village communities demanded the making of majestic images of the ancestors they worshipped. At the dawn of civilisation, these images in folk style were the only tangible link between the various tribes when writing was as yet unknown. With the passage of

time, the motifs used in this art form continued to change according to the changing needs of the various cults. In certain remote villages, on account of their geographical isolation, very many types of folk bronzes are still in existence, like other specimens of art. Some of them are still in a good state of preservation. These images along with other folk art forms have proved to be the cultural backbone of the artistic development of the village communities.

The meaning of strange signs and symbols, mysterious deities and practices depicted in rural art which occur again and again on the folk bronzes. The illustrations in the present enthralling volume draw us into the strange and fascinating world of folk bronzes at once remote yet part of our heritage and still relevant to rural people today. To gain an understanding of folk culture and its art, we must consider the whole range of Indian culture from the earliest times, especially terracottas and bronzes that have come down to us and the ones being made in the present-day villages. All these specimens, whatever the date or the period in history to which they belong, are treated as the single and in a certain sense timeless subject. The history of art enables us to identify and track down elements of cultural continuity in the form of artistic motifs transmitted by one province to another, and of establishing links that connect the people with their neighbours and predecessors. These interconnections both in time and space are an enthralling study in itself.

It is still not known how and when the earliest folk bronzes were wrought. It can be claimed with sufficient certainty that the earliest man offered his homage to the Supreme Principle through images and symbols which were the spontaneous expression of his personal conception of the Almighty. He started by making clay images and later conceived the vital, dynamic images of Hindu gods and goddesses in brass, copper and bronze.

Since prehistoric times, it has been a widespread belief among the ruralfolks that the gods descended down to Earth to help them, especially in times of adversity. So it was through these metal images they tried to propitiate and placate the mysterious powers. It seems that the ruralfolks were aware of both the mysterious outer space and the inner space. They looked upon everything in the form of a deity, be it a tree, a snake, water or sky

and they associated each of them with some kind of vague pantheon. Many of these deities were conceived as incarnations of the prominent deities of Hinduism, viz. Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Surya etc. The purpose of creating these bronzes was to invoke the magic of primitive consciousness. The bronze images in folk style came into existence for the religious needs of the local inhabitants. They are much smaller in size — about 6 inches to about one-and-a-half inch in height. The basic reason for their small size was that they could be carried in a bag for worship when the villagers set out on a pilgrimage or journey. Most of the smaller images are sculpturally as well integrated as the best of the larger ones.

These bronze images are enshrined in the village temples and also grace the household altars in rural homes. Sometimes they are placed under a tree within the temple courtyard for worship. This practice dates from time immemorial, as is evident from their style which is definitely ancient and indigenous. They derive their special significance and suggestiveness from their relation with the hallowed temples, the small shrines dotting the countryside and the venerable trees interspersing its expanse, the vast stillness of the landscape and the luminous blue of the sky above all these blend to endow each single image with a meaning beyond its own existence. The large number in which these images are available display their hold on popular imagination. Through the length and breadth of this region, they have been over the centuries and still are worshipped not only as representing divine presence but also as the primary sources of refuge and consolation.

Ritual ceremonies with all their intricacies are the salient features of the self-expression of the ruralfolks. Many of their art forms are a result of their deep spiritual experience. The age-old emotional content conditioned by environment and social behaviour has added a great deal of significance to these art forms.

The worship of Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha, Krishna, Rama, Bhairava, Garuda, Surya, Durga addressed as the Mother Goddess or the Great Goddess and minor deities is prevalent in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Nasik in Maharashtra since very ancient times. The metal images of these deities are to be found in these provinces in large numbers. In Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, Shaivism became popular in the 6th and 7th centuries.

The worship of Surya and Karttikeya became common in the 6th and 8th centuries. Orthodox Vaishnavism was established not until the 8th century when the worship of Krishna gained popularity. In the 10th century, the Surya cult was replaced by that of Lakshmi-Narayana also addressed as Surya-Narayana, into which it was finally absorbed. It was not until the middle of the 17th century that Rama addressed as Raghunathji, Raghubirji or Siyapati came to be worshipped as the patron-deity of the royal family of Kulu State. Until then, Krishna was more popular. Episodes from the Ramayana were widely illustrated in painting, embroidery, woodcarving, stonecarving and metal engravings but very few bronze images of Rama have come down to us. They compare unfavourably with the large number of images of Balakrishna, Krishna Venugopala, etc.

Apart from the bronze images of Hindu deities, there are a large number representing a man riding a horse. What is the meaning and use of these equestrian figurines, one wonders? These images represent clan ancestors, village heroes who fell in the battlefield fighting against the enemy forces or Spirit Riders. It was a common practice in these areas to deify these human beings after their death. Ancestor worship has been a common feature of the socio-religious life of the inhabitants of our region and has found artistic expression in innumerable ways. A variety of objects in wood, stone and metal are made to propitiate the dead ancestor, to placate his soul as well as to perpetuate his memory for the generations to come. Since all these ancestors were deemed to be extraordinarily heroic, superhuman beings, they were always represented as riding on a horse in metal images which were intended for worship. In Punjab, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, the most popular among this class of village heroes was Gugga Chauhan, a valiant hero who is still worshipped most fervidly in the village shrines dotting the length and breadth of these provinces and has inspired the rural metalsmiths to cast innumerable bronzes of horseriders in which the figure of the horse is exalted to show a village identity in a variety of styles. They play a vital role in tribal rites. It should be borne in mind that all the equestrian images do not represent Gugga Chauhan who was also addressed as Mundalikha in Chamba on account of a popular legend according to which Gugga continued to fight with the Muslims even after his head had been cut off. This was attributed to his miraculous divine powers.

FOLK BRONZES AND TERRACOTTAS

The terracottas and the folk bronzes are closely allied crafts. They are of deepest interest to us for in them we can recognise reflections of villagers' innermost instincts and urges. In fact, the folk bronzes share all the basic features of terracotta figurines such as pinched up nose, large bulging eyes, a long strip for mouth or slitted wide open mouth, thick set neck, stumpy hands, sloping forehead, long pendant earlobes or spiral shaped ears, tapering arms and legs and applied ornaments.

The terracottas are an important link in the long chain of the history of folk bronzes for they serve to fill the missing gaps. The clay figurines were employed as a popular and inexpensive medium to convey the message of art and beauty amongst the masses, as also to serve its religious and secular needs. As in folk bronzes, in the terracotta figurines were assimilated the centuries-old art traditions and culture and this heritage was projected in beautiful forms. Their importance lies in the fact that they help us date the folk bronzes on stylistic grounds, for the terracottas have been dated convincingly stratigraphically.

The Mother Goddess in her most primitive form has certain well defined features which bespeak of the evolution of an almost fixed iconographic type. The outstanding feature is the applied and incised eye which is formed by applying oval pellets of clay to the face and incising them from nose to ear by the stroke of some sharp-edged instrument.

The masterpieces of terracottas unearthed from the Indus Valley sites suggest they continue an earlier tradition. At Mohenjodaro, numerous small images usually of clay or limestone were found in the dwellings. Apparently these served for worship at the family altars which would indicate that some kind of household cult must have prevailed in the Indus cities similar to that of the Hindu religion of today in which small images of clay, wood or bronze are used for family worship. The Mohenjodaro figurines may therefore be regarded as our most ancient evidence of an immemorial deep-rooted Indian tradition.

The art objects from the Indus valley sites include specimens of both classical and folk style. This is more clearly evident from animal figurines, specimens of human sculptures being too few to allow us comparison. We take

Fig. II Female head, Kulli.
3rd millennium B.C.

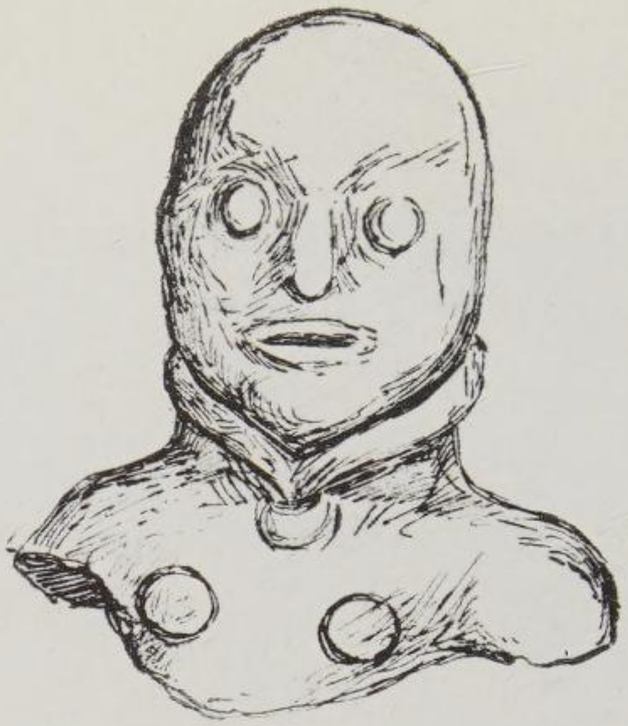


Fig. III Female Bust, Harappa.
3rd millennium B.C.

Fig. I A female figurine, Terracotta, Sunga. 2nd Century B.C.

Fig. IV Shiva and Parvati, Soft stone, Kangra. 19th century.

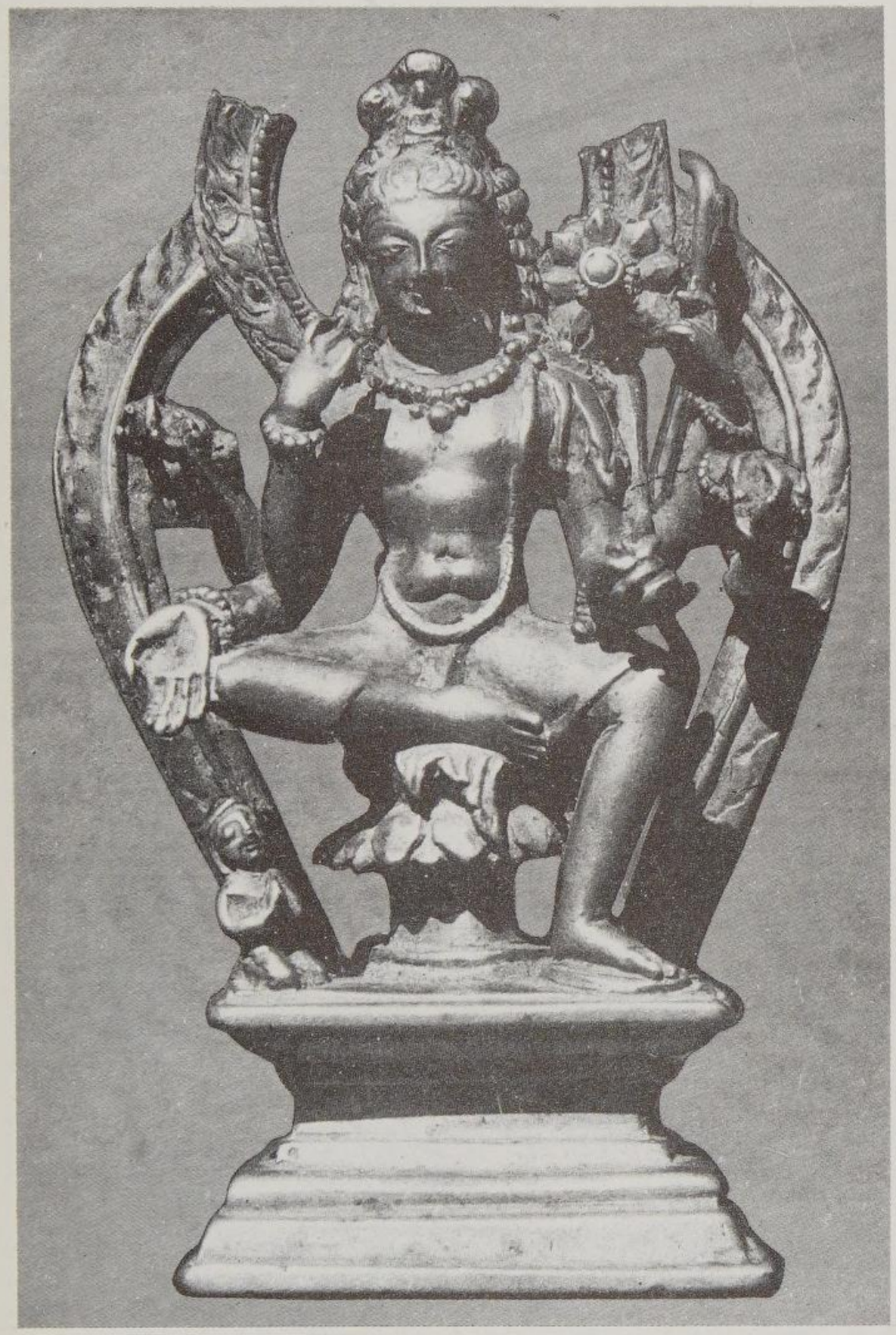


Fig. V Buddha Avalokiteshvara, Kaśhmir. 7th century.

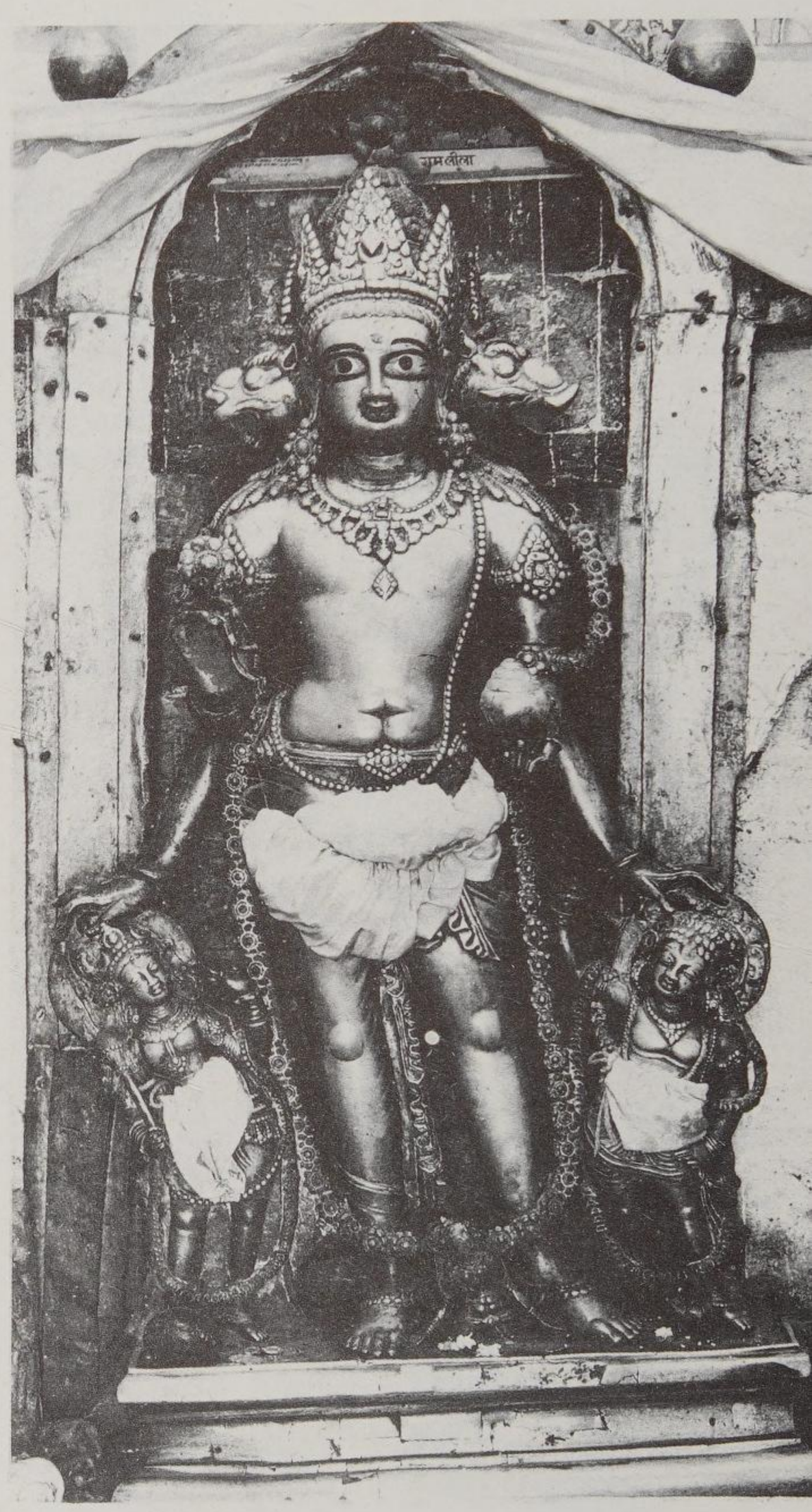


Fig. VI Vishnu flanked by Chakrapurusha and Gadadevi, 10th-11th century.

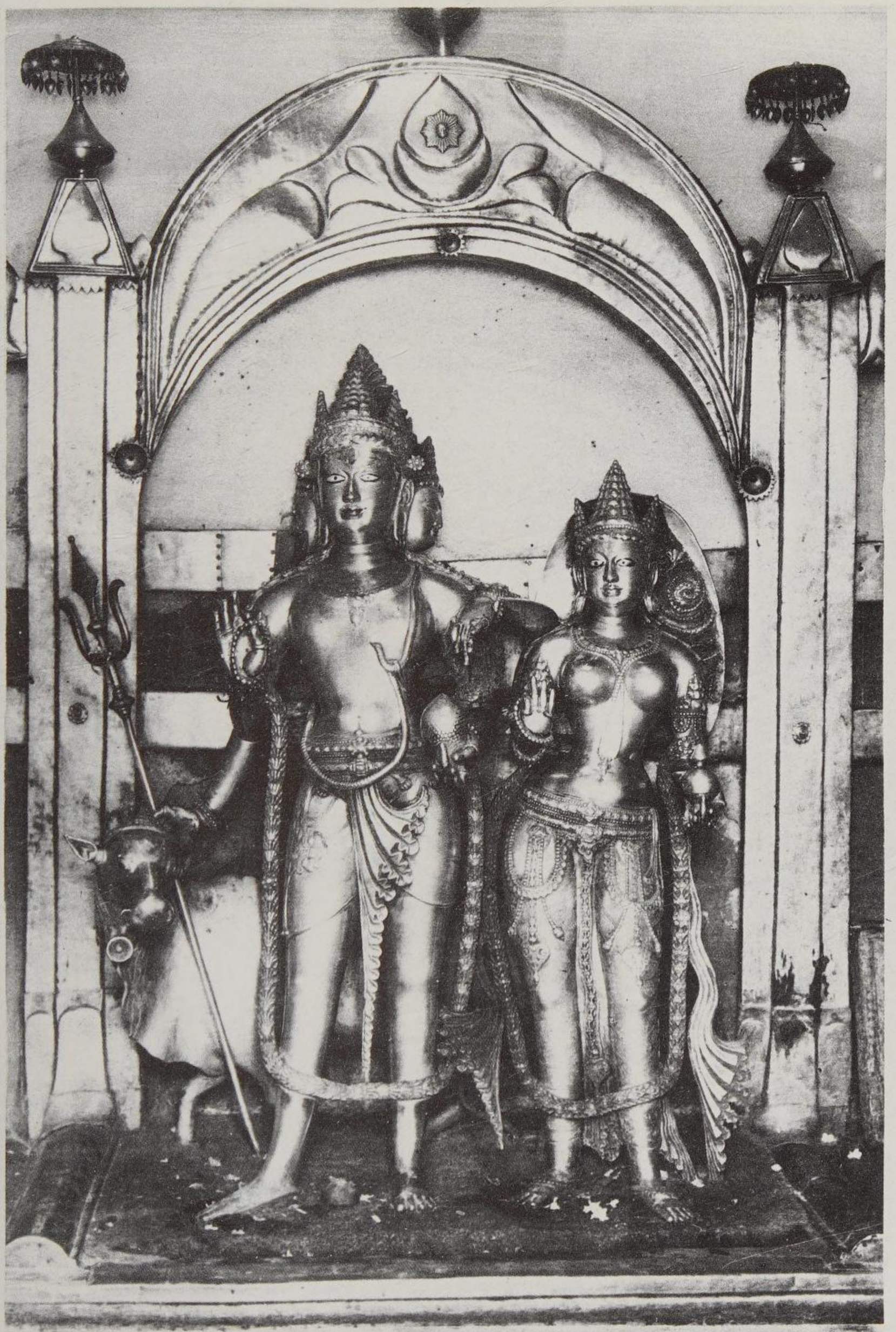


Fig. VII Shiva and Parvati with bull, Chamba, 10th-11th century.

Fig. VIII Shiva and Parvati, Chamba, 12th century.

Fig. IX Jain Tirthankara, South Rajasthan. 14th century.

Fig. X Parashvanath, Rajasthan. 16th century.

Fig. XI Ten-armed Mahishasuramardini, Himachal. 15th century.

the example of two terracotta bulls : one exemplifies the intuitive and sensuous naturalism of India's Great Tradition the other the stylised, abstract and folk variety, symbolising power and naive simplification that persists in our folk arts of later periods. Examples of the latter have a much greater continuity in time and are more difficult to assign firmly to this period unless excavated in situ at an Indus Valley site.

It will be noted that in later periods, we come across the same animal figurines as from the Indus Valley sites such as cows, elephants, bulls, etc. which suggests that these beliefs lie deep in the indigenous culture of India and are still profoundly active here.

These daringly conceived and superbly executed folk bronzes derive from the long and masterly tradition of terracottas. In form and conception they belong to the family of terracotta baked clay, figurines and soft stone images. Enormous eyes, affixed ornaments, pinched faces, incision of lines, dots and circles on head, chest and other parts of the body, tubular wire-like arms, aureoles framing the body etc. are some of the characteristic features common to both art forms. Both are modelled crudely and vivaciously with naturalistic intent and have the same directness and spontaneity. The combination of basic shapes and realistic modelling is common to all such images.

Some folk bronzes seem to derive from moulded type figures which were used as votive offerings. These bronzes bear a striking resemblance to the terracotta figurines discovered from different historical sites of Pataliputra, Mathura, Besnagar, Sari-Dheri, Taxila, Pawaya, Bangarh etc. which date back to a period extending mainly from the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana to the Gupta periods. These clay images are usually moulded by hand and completed in one sitting. If the ruralfolks wanted to get the image in bronze, copper or brass, they used wax instead of clay and gave it the same touch and got the final result through the lost wax process. In this historical group those modelled by hand are part of the ageless type. In Rajasthan, clay images of Issarji and Parvati are made for the Gangaur festival. Sometimes only clay or terracotta heads of Shiva and Parvati were also used for this purpose. They are about two or three centuries old. Identical bronze heads also are available showing the remarkable similarity between the two crafts.

In western India, metal plaques representing the Hindu deities such as Virabhadra, Durga etc. are made for religious processions. All the figures and symbols are engraved on copper plates in repousse technique. In these plaques, the delineation of the main figural symbol and other accessories follows a special scheme. The figure of the deity occupies the central space and is often enclosed within an arched niche crowned by a stylised kirttimukha mask. The symbols sacred to the deity along with the Sun and the Moon occupy the spandrels and the base. In my opinion, these plaques and the expressively rendered conventional scheme followed in the delineation of form and figure is to a very large extent influenced by the terracotta plaques made in the Molela village near Udaipur in Rajasthan.

Primitive modelling, naive forms and spontaneous style are some of the features common to both the terracottas and folk bronzes. These features are inherent in the terracotta figurines from Mohenjodaro which were evidently their prototypes and demonstrate the cultural survivals from the earliest times to be observed in many villages.

The rural and primitive cultures may be inferior to the mature cultures in their level of material culture and of economic and technical development, but this is not true of their art.

We must take the interaction between folk and classical cultures into account. The latter developed in soil fertilised by one or more folk cultures bringing out and formulating in their art the concepts held by their antecedents. These versions are subsequently transmitted back to the rural cultures in the course of trade, conquest or the general exchange of influence and are then preserved in that form by the older cultures often for considerable periods of time. This interplay governs the pattern of growth in folk cultures which are no longer left in a state of infancy or at one particular level of development.

The mature cultures were known as classical cultures and were highly developed. The same term is applicable to existing cultures that survive alongside the mature cultures though at a lower level of development. From the dawn of history, we find classical cultures surrounded by groups of folk cultures which are more or less dependent on them or have at any rate not remained at their original stage. What that was like we can only guess. Conversely the great

achievements of the mature cultures on the practical and intellectual levels are rooted in the rural ones which they superseded and among which the possibilities of progress were first dimly conceived and anticipated. The folk culture often incubates the basic ideas which the mature culture then brings to fruition. Folk bronzes and other forms of folk art illustrate this process. There are certain ornamental motifs or styles which in many cases have been given a new lease of life in classical art. Numerous examples of the transmission of very rural motifs will be shown in this book. The essential achievement of classical art is the creation and imposition of order and form. People, state and city are subjected to an all-embracing concept of the universe.

The tradition of casting bronzes has been carried on over the centuries in the villages by families of metalworkers who inherited their traditional skill from their forefathers and continued to practice their hereditary vocation unquestioningly without any thought of mobility. These artisans were known as Tamta or Tamota in Garhwal, Bharawa or Bharwa in Mewar. In the lower reaches of Kulu, Chamba, Kangra and Mahasu, apart from the traditional skilled image-makers known as "Chitera" (literally meaning a painter), specialised artisans known as Thathiara or Kasera (common term used for blacksmiths) who, besides working in iron and the like metals, were equally adept at casting metal images, engraving, chasing, repousse technique and some of them could even fashion delicate ornaments.

In the course of my tours in search of folk bronzes, I came across people who looked upon folk bronzes as festival toys. May be this attitude also contributed to the negligence and obscurity that the folk bronzes have suffered for so long. Such a phenomenon might be on account of terracottas, for very often clay toys and terracotta figurines are regarded as being one and the same thing. But people very often forget that toys are consumer goods whereas folk bronzes are intended specifically for worship.

Historical Background

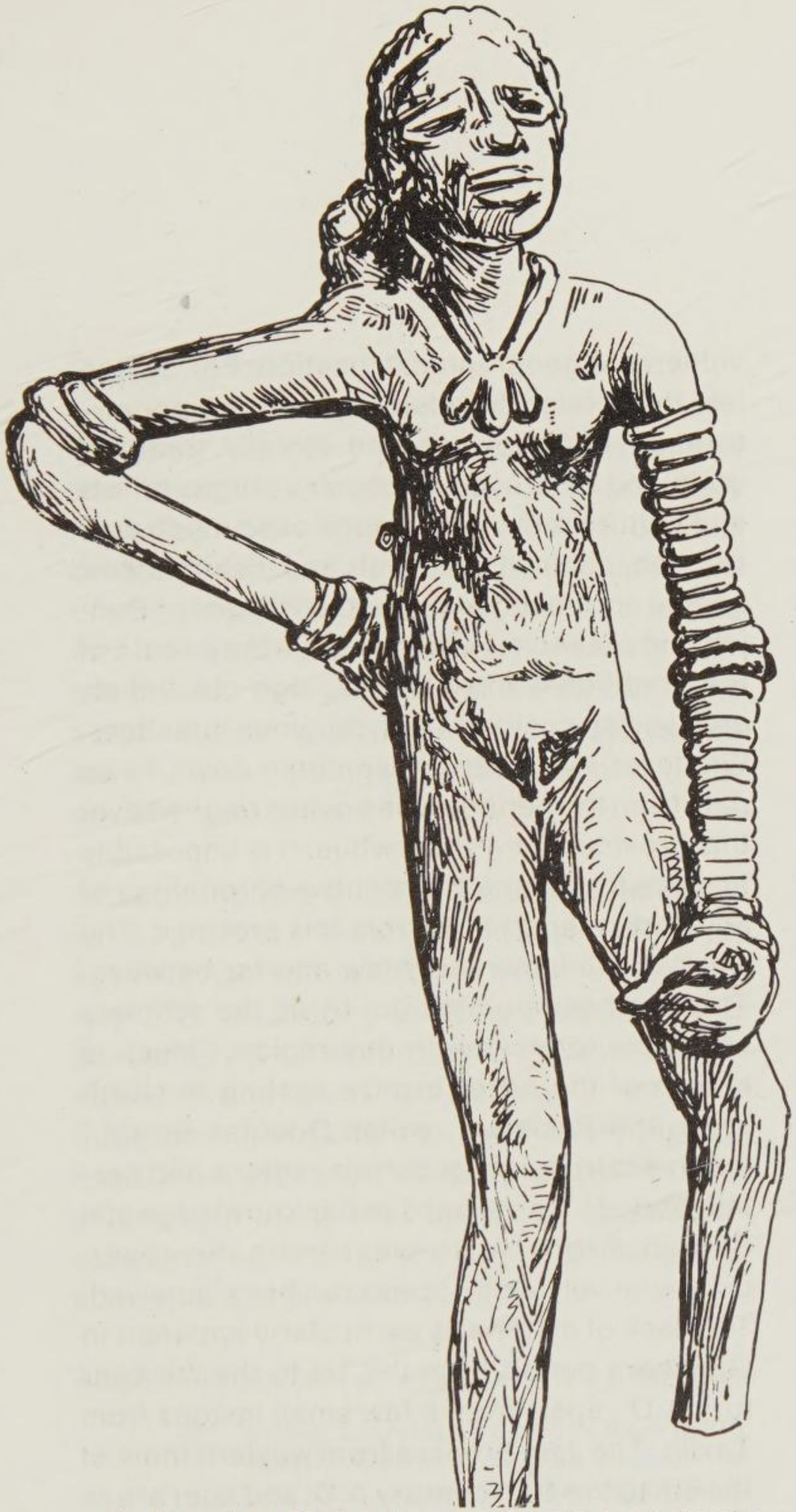
The history of folk bronzes is shrouded in the mist of hoary antiquity. Till now, it has not been possible to trace their origins or chronological development. What is certain is that the prehistoric man wrought such images and symbols to pay homage to the Supreme Principle which, he thought, governed his life as well as the entire Universe. These images and symbols are, therefore, the spontaneous expression of his joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. From prehistoric caves in India have been unearthed ancient relics, crude motifs and emblems which clearly testify to the fact that folk images date back to very ancient times and have since then been continuing to develop along vigorous lines.

These bronzes are certainly of ancient origin. This is evident from the bronze figurine of the dancing girl unearthed from Mohenjodaro which can be regarded as the earliest specimen of folk bronzes, although it was fashioned by a people belonging to one of the most sophisticated and advanced urban civilisations in the world. The same views have been expressed by B.B. Lal:

"The earliest known Indian bronze figurine was discovered at Mohenjodaro where a highly developed urban civilisation flourished in the 3rd millennium B.C. Mohenjodaro has yielded a large number of copper and bronze objects.... the art of metal casting and metal working had reached a high level of technical excellence as demonstrated by the remarkable bronze statuette of the dancing girl."

That the tradition of making folk bronzes is as old as Indian civilisation is evident from this bronze figurine discovered from the remains of Mohenjodaro. The figure of the dancing girl has been interpreted by Heinrich Zimmer as representing the deva-dasi, the female dancers institutionally attached to South Indian temples who dedicated their lives to the temple deities. No one can help being attracted to its alert resilience and refined force. The statuette displays the graceful slender figure of a girl, full of the dynamism of life, some hidden energy welling from within that constituted

1. Lal, B.B.'s note to A.K. Coomaraswamy, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1955, under 'Bronze and Brass Ornamental Works', quoted by Ruth Reeves: Cire Perdue Casting in India, Crafts Museum, New Delhi, 1962. p. 19.



2. Dancing Girl, a bronze figurine, Mohenjo-daro (3500 B.C.).

one of the most characteristic features of classical as well as folk style bronzes. Most of these qualities characterise the bronzes fashioned in later periods; this fact suggests a continuity of at least several thousand years. This figurine is no doubt the most ancient representation we possess which probably served as the prototype of the Indian deity who was later worshipped variously as the Mother of the Universe, the Goddess Earth.

The traditions and techniques of metal casting in India have been recorded in ancient Sanskrit religious texts. According to the Agni Purana, images made of gold and silver yield the greatest religious merit. In the Manu Samhita, mention is made of "mining operations", metal manufacturers, guilds of metal craftsmen etc. which are enough to suggest that metal craft already had a highly developed tradition. Though fewer references to metalcraft are found in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata abounds in such allusions. The Vishnudharmottara Purana, the Jain texts such as the Anuyogadvara Churni and the Acharanga Sutra and numerous texts of the mediaeval period also furnish useful information on metalwork. The references in our ancient literature to metal objects cannot be dismissed as

merely fanciful accounts of non-existent facts, as has been done by western scholars. No ancient specimens exist on account of heavy destruction by foreign invaders and the tropical climate of our country. "The climatic conditions in India being what they are." to quote Ruth Reeves, "innumerable works of art have perished; also that many of the treasures mentioned in these texts were either plundered and taken to other countries or destroyed by iconoclastic zeal. The metal arts still extant and which by markings can be chronologically verified or those being currently excavated by archaeologists reveal that the metal artisans of India of former times were capable of producing. Nevertheless, when mention of artefacts or craft techniques is made in the epic literature, an open mind must be kept; for not infrequently similar artefacts have been excavated by archaeologists, proving that to some extent these ancient texts can be relied upon."[2]

Insofar as the folk bronzes and metal craft of the Punjab and the frontier regions are concerned, very little has survived compared to other provinces. This was so because of its vulnerable geographical location. For centuries, the foreign invaders entered the country through this province and literally trampled uodn and destroyed whatever vestiges of arts and culture remained. Inspite of so much destruction, political upheavels and disturbances, people continued to live in the villages of Punjab and preserved whatever little they could of the traditional life-patterns, age-old beliefs and social customs and religious practices. Whatever specimens have come down to us date from the periods when peace reigned over this province for a short while. It is impossible to piece together a consecutive chronology of any particular art form from this province. The sources are lamentably few and far between. This has been pointed out by all the scholars who were interested in this region. "Much is known of the art of bronze casting in North India and Pakistan", writes Douglas Barret," but this is true only of certain regions and certain periods. Large gaps in our knowledge still remain. From North-west India, however, comparatively little seems to have survived. This lack of material is particularly apparent in Gandhara period from the 1st to the 7th century A.D., apart from a few small images from Taxila. The Jain bronzes from western India of the 6th to the 16th century A.D. and later are as

2. Reeves, Ruth: Cire Perdue Casting in India, op. cit., pp 24-25.

numerous."[3]

Whatever has come to light so far shows that the folk culture and artistic traditions have remained unchanged since the time of their origin. The cultural traits of the ruralfolks are unswerving and exceedingly tenacious and they have survived from hoary antiquity until the present times. Wherever we do not come across actual specimens of art objects, we have no choice but to rely on allusions in our ancient literary texts.

After a long gap of a few thousand years, we have Panini, our great grammarian, informing us in his Ashtadhyayi that in his time (4th century B.C., according to some historians, and 8th century B.C., according to others), numerous cities and towns had come up in northern India where metal crafts were fervidly practised. His works are a valuable record not only of arts and crafts that flourished contemporaneously but also of the social, political and cultural life in pre-Mauryan times.

Another important source that fills up this gap

3. Barret, Douglas's "Bronzes from North Western India and Western Pakistan" in Lalit Kala Akademi journal, No. 11, April 1962. p. 35.

3. Female figurine, terracotta, Harappa.

are the terracotta figurines. We have devoted quite a few pages to a discussion on the affinities that exist between the terracottas and the folk bronzes. Here it suffices to say that the very existence of terracotta figurines at a particular period suggests that the folk bronzes must have been made contemporaneously, for both are allied crafts. The Mauryan period (322-184 B.C.) has yielded a large number of terracotta figurines. After the Mauryan period, I focus my attention on the North-western frontier areas of India which were ruled over by the Indo-Greek and Indo-Parthian dynasties (150 B.C. 60 A.D.) whose courts attracted many foreign metalsmiths who brought with them imported styles, namely Hellenistic traits which, however, failed to make a deep impact on the indigenous artistic traditions and did little to promote the high promise of metal craft established by the bronze figurine of the dancing girl from the Indus Valley site of Mohenjodaro.

Metal images in classical style continued to be wrought through the subsequent centuries and the traditions of casting bronzes were perfected in the Gupta period, as is evident from the renowned masterly image of the Buddha from Sultanganj dating from early Gupta period and the gold-plated bronze image of Manjushri recovered from the Balai Dhap mound near the ruins of Mahasthan (now in the Rajshahi Museum, Bangladesh).

In the Gupta (4th-6th century A.D.) and post-Gupta (6th-8th century A.D.) periods the metal casters' craft, especially in so far as the fashioning of divine images is concerned, attained the highest degree of perfection and skill which is evident from the superb and almost life-size bronze statues of the Great Goddess Durga, Shiva, Ganesha and Narasimha enshrined in the ancient temples of Brahmaur and Chhatrarhi dating from mid-7th century A.D., the large number of bronzes that have come down to us from Kashmir and other sites in the north-western frontier region, Rajasthan, Nalanda, Kurkihar, Jhaveri (Chittagong) etc. in eastern India. In fact, these specimens amply show that the Indian metalsmiths had long experience of working in this particular branch of fine arts and also testify to the fact that although no bronzes have come down to us from the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushana and Gandhara periods, the art of bronze casting must have been practised during these eras and the images have unfortunately been lost.

Around 700 A.D., the princely kingdoms in the

Punjab Himalayas located mainly in the Shivalik ranges, namely Kulu, Kangra Chamba, Mandi, etc., were in close contact with Kashmir, as is evident from the striking stylistic similarities between the stone sculptures and other art foms of these areas. Special mention may here be made of the strikingly beautiful and highly impressive bronze statues from the Brahmaur temples mentioned above. These date from mid-7th century A.D. and are still in worship. Fortunately they are all inscribed images and the inscriptions mention the names not only of Gugga the master craftsman but also that of King Meruvarman who commissioned their execution. These statues executed in post-Gupta style are immensely important in the history of Indian sculpture, for they shed a revealing light on the area of influence of the post-Gupta style. Not only that, the post-Gupta style held a deep sway on the artists-sculptors of Kashmir as well who continued to work in this style till the end of the 9th century A.D., although by that time it had become slightly modified having been blended with certain local traditions. The art of bronze casting came to thrive in Kashmir during the reign of the famous king Lalitaditya Muktapida (720-756 A.D.) who extended the boundaries of his kingdom to Punjab and parts of Afghanistan in the north-west as well as to Gujarat (the Lat Desh) in the south. Remarkable examples of stone sculpture and bronze images were fashioned during his reign. A number of scholars have informed us the same thing in diverse ways. One of them, D.I. Sauf, writes:

"In the 7th century, under the rulers of the Karkota dynasty in Kashmir, there was beginning a period of political unity and cultural stability which led Kashmir into some considerable significance for India. The leading Emperor Lalitaditya (720-756 A.D.) could expand his reign far over the Punjab and parts of Afghanistan. The great religions had significant interpreters in Kashmir which unfolded new and independent doctrines of Hinduism (Vaishnavism) and Tantric Buddhism. The sculpture in stone and bronze was representing also an independent school among the Indian arts and later tradition."[4]

When highly refined and mature classical art traditions flourished in the courts of mighty emperors and kings, the other stream of down-to-earth and forthright rural arts continued to

4. Sauf, D.I: Catalogue "The Buddhist Sculpture in India and Her influence on the Art of Tibet". p.8

flow along their silent course in the villages of diverse provinces, without being influenced or hampered by the changing socio-political conditions of the various kingdoms.

The bronzes fashioned during the 8th and 10th centuries A.D. have been aptly termed Kashmiri. The Kashmiri school of sculpture in stone as well as in metal emerged after the interaction of Gandhara and post-Gupta styles of sculpture, although the latter school was more dominant. This style was not confined to Kashmir alone but spread to Chamba, Kulu and other contiguous areas also.

In the 10th-11th centuries A.D., the Himalayan kingdoms of Kangra, Kulu, Chamba and Mandi fell into the orbit of influence of the Gurjara-Pratihara style. This style influenced not only the mature sculptures but to some extent left its imprint on the folk bronzes and other forms of folk arts. A large number of relief sculptures carved in stone and wood clearly suggest that their carver was inspired to a very large extent by the stone slabs in Pratihara style lying in the temple complexes. It goes without saying that the folk bronzes were also executed more or less in the same style. This shall be discussed in greater detail when I talk about the impact of

4. Varahi, metal figurine, Rajasthan. 17th century.

classical style on folk bronzes and vice versa.

Apart from the inscribed bronze statues of Chamba and the Kashmiri sculptures which have all been dated to the 8th and 10th centuries A.D., we have a large number of bronze images of Jain Tirthankaras which almost always bear an inscription at the back indicating the date (Samvat) of its creation. In fact the study of Indian bronzes, the only school which poses no problem as to chronology or precise dating is that of the Jain bronzes which were cast in large numbers in Rajasthan and Gujarat: All the images bear an inscription at the back or on the pedestal which specifically mentions the date of its execution. Most of these images are in mature style and remarkable for their finish and perfection, a large number appear to be a little crude and grotesque and have slightly distorted limbs which lend them a somewhat folkish look. In fact, they seem to stand midway between classical and folk. Such images generally date from the 14th century and sometimes are of a later date. It is possible that these bronzes were cast by rural metalsmiths or by less skilled artisans and had a definite bearing on the folk bronzes.

On the basis of these epigraphs and their stylistic characteristics, the scholars of Indian art have been able to piece together a more or less consecutive chronology of Indian bronzes in classical style. Can we reconstruct a similar historical account of bronzes in folk style?

No, alas! There are a number of reasons. First of all, we do not come across very old specimens of folk bronzes. Some bronzes have been dated to centuries preceding our own on the basis of their style. Whenever we find identical stylistic features and treatment in other art forms in classical style such as painting, stone and metal sculptures or other objects, we presume that our bronzes might have been executed contemporaneously or a few years later. Secondly, no written records or literary references exist to enable us to date them, for the artisan continued to work in the style he was trained in unquestioningly over the centuries. This way, the original style did not undergo much change in the course of centuries. The basic features have remained unchanged. The bronzes in folk style do not have chronology but they certainly have a tradition which has persisted unaltered since the day of its inception till the present times.

These observations can be summed up more concisely in the following manner:

The chronology is still uncertain, but stylistic features enable us to date quite a few folk bronzes. The timeless nature of objects inhibits its precise dating. Many derive from the great tradition but have been magically transformed by the ingenuity of craftsmen working largely with whatever materials were at hand. Some illustrate the tenacity of traditions that reach as far back as the Indus Valley civilisation. Others have the distinctively brash character of tribal art or the unabashed naivete common to folk art throughout the world.

The same views have been expressed by archaeologist K.V. Soundra Rajan:

"There is as yet no consecutive account available of the centuries during which the transition from the prehistoric to the ancient and mediaeval world of the Punjab took place. In the Sivalik and the snow ranges, we find the most numerous vestiges of ancient and later Hindu civilisation from the Kushana and Gupta times up to the flourishing of Kangra art in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Since no adequate archaeological excavations have been carried out in the Punjab, Rajasthan or Gujarat, it is difficult to trace the history of bronzes of these areas."

"The Rajasthan area is, in many respects, the terra incognita of archaeologists and art historians. Both its ancient seats of power as well as the multitude of its temple ruins have received anything like casual attention only in recent years. The origin of the Gurjaras, the most important rulers in Rajasthan and Gujarat has been considered by some that they were foreigners who came in the wake of the Hun invasions and infiltrated across Punjab and Rajasthan into western India. It would also seem to be obvious that it was only the sudden political vacuum created by the decline of Gupta power that saw the rise of such a people whose earliest kingdom was founded around Jodhpur in Rajasthan in the middle of the 6th century A.D."[5]

Most of the ancient specimens of folk bronzes have perished or been destroyed. This might have been on account of vandalism of all kinds, ignorance on the part of their owners, etc. It seems that a large number have been melted for making utensils. Whatever is available now dates back to less than a century, at the most they are fifty to seventy years old.

5. Soundara Rajan, K.V.'s "Some Iconographic Elements of Pre-Mediaeval Temples" in Lalit Kala Akademi journal No. 8, Oct. 1960, p. 15.

5. Equestrian figure, Rajasthan. Late 18th century.

Folk Bronzes of India

The folk bronzes of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat and the contiguous areas are amongst the most fascinating examples of traditional and folk arts of India. A casual glance might make one think that they are weird, crude, grotesque and completely devoid of aesthetic value. This seems to be one of the reasons why they have remained in the background for so long. But to a well-informed and cultivated mind endowed with the quickening awareness of modern aesthetics, these folk style images appear to be eminently alluring by virtue of their startling primitive vitality as well as their dramatic and dynamic qualities. They deserve a place of special importance in the history of art not only because, along with other forms of folk tradition, they are one branch of traditional arts which has continued to maintain their antiquity and traditional characteristics over thousands of years, but also because in them lie hidden the seeds of perfection and purity of the more widely esteemed classical arts. The immense significance of folk art vis-a-vis classical art has been summed up in the following passage:

"Just as the child's mind gives an indication of the mental subconscious world of the growing adult in its psychic aspect wherefrom the main trends of the character of the later adult can be easily conceived, so too one can easily touch the nucleus of the cultural aspect of all the branches of our now fully developed art and culture, if one can investigate the significance of our folk arts."[1]

The same view has been expressed by the renowned British sculptor Henry Moore that "folk art is the mother of all arts." This is true of the images in folk style which have maintained a continuous tradition throughout the broad span of time and space. For more than 5000 years, since the Indus Valley civilisation period until the last century, this tradition has remained vital.

Most of these images are small. Nevertheless, in concept and in effect they are monumental. They give some indication of the extraordinary imagination and artistic resources of the rural metalsmiths.

1. Srinivasan, T.N.'s "South Indian Folk Arts" in Silpi, Vol. I, No. 2, Madras. September 1946. p. 21.

There is a great variety of images, each marked by a divine expression on the face. In some of them, refinement of execution is sacrificed for the sake of dramatic expression. Some images displaying slender weightless figures show an almost conscious stylisation. In each bronze, the metal craftsman gives expression to his personal vision and style; each is marked by striking directness and energy. All the deities are shown seated or standing on a pedestal which might be a raised rectangle or semi-circle resembling the temple plinth or a completely flat base.

Barely visible in the dark hollow of the village shrine or household altars, these crudely fashioned images are at once terrifyingly awesome, sublimely weird and exercise a spell of magic and mystery on the beholder. Whatever their specific configurations may seem to suggest, they invariably bear the imprint of folk imagery. Their contours and facial features display the locally qualified yet typical visualisations of the deities. Often crudely fashioned, these images are at once vivid and fascinating. This crudity is ascribed by scholars to their having been fashioned by untutored hands which is a very incorrect observation. We cannot say they are the work of untutored hands, for these images are perfect technically as well as iconographically and display the artisans' complete knowledge of the canons of the shilpashastras, myths, legends and folklore, the numerical symbolism, philosophical ideas and beliefs peculiar to Hinduism which invest them. This is also evident from the metal-workers' concern for the proper visual presentation of the deities. The spirit necessary to achieve this had eliminated the element of self-consciousness from these images. Harmony with rules laid down in the canon and the disciplined organisation of form absorbed his attention and the result was refreshingly genuine. The only difference between the artisans working in classical and rural styles is that the latter were more free, direct and spontaneous in their approach. Body proportions or artistic perfection were not of great importance nor was a conscious attempt made at harmonious arrangement.

Some scholars have referred to some of these images as "unidentifiable shapes". In most cases, it is not difficult to identify the deities. We are aided in this process by the attributes held in their hands, their accompanying fig-

ures and vehicles (vahana) and symbols often linked with them.

These images were cast in a style transmitted from generation to generation. So what emerged were crude figures with disproportionate limbs. In spite of being highly distorted, they are vibrant from within and dramatically expressive of their inherent qualities. Distortions, exaggerations and the use of strong contrasts give them a dramatic intensity. A bold interplay of curved lines and surfaces gives them a violent driving force and their sensuous organic forms seem imbued with a powerful magic.

Some folk bronzes are unique works of art. Their odd, freakish, archaic and bizarre shapes derive from the primordial world of mystery surrounding them. The archaic forces permeate every stone and tree to which the villagers offer their prayers on the way to the humble village shrines of solitary images placed at the foot of a tree or near a spring. This effect is further heightened by their archaic features, the emphasis being on the round or oval head which is much larger than the rest of the body which is generally slender and attenuated. The facial features are characterised by an enormous mouth, protruding nose and large round eyes. Arms and legs are short and stumpy in some cases, thin and long like tubes or wires in others. The chest has two pellets suggestive of breasts common to both male and female figurines. The ornaments are treated as decorative details. The diversity of conventions used in the representation of facial features and parts of human body is bewildering. These stylisations appear on figurines in countless combinations and sometimes make it very difficult to ascribe specific styles to the images. Common to all images are a stiffness and simplification of form, though vigorous action is portrayed in some of them such as the images of Durga Mahishasuramardini and Narasimha (man-lion) incarnation of Vishnu emerging out of a split pillar to kill the demon Hiranyakashipu.

These images represent mainly the manifestations of three principal deities: Durga, Shiva and Vishnu. Durga may be shown as riding on the back of her lion vehicle or slaying the buffalo demon (Mahishasura); her tamasik aspect of Mahakali equally had a firm hold on popular imagination in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Shiva is often depicted as a two-armed god carrying a trident. More commonly he was worshipped in his Mukhalinga form. Among

his other forms are included his Bhairava and Virabhadra aspects. Vishnu images are available in large numbers which represent him singly or accompanied by Lakshmi. Among his incarnations, the most popular is Krishna; next to him comes Narasimha. The images of Ganesha, Hanuman, Garuda and Surya fall in the category of the universally popular gods and are equally profuse.

Some scholars have created a lot of confusion by saying that these images are those of village gods or the likenesses of local gods assimilated into the reigning cult. Actually they are only diverse manifestations of Durga, Shiva and Vishnu worshipped under various names and not separate entities of the supernatural essence. The bronze images of Durga Mahishasuramardini are among the best specimens of rural metalcraft. The Great Goddess, often represented as having four, eight or ten arms, is always shown in standing posture, one of her legs pressing down the neck of the buffalo demon (Mahisha) whom she slays with a trident thrust into its back. These bronze images stand out as the most dramatic, dynamic and expressive specimens.

The great popularity of the theme of Durga Mahishasuramardini in our area of study can be demonstrated by the large number of bronze images that have come down to us. Mythologically speaking, the Mahishasuramardini form of the goddess is one of her earliest and most important forms which has been described beautifully in the Devi Mahatmya section of the Markandeyapurana. Diverse texts describe different iconic types of the goddess but the difference lies mainly in the number of arms attributed to the Devi which varies from four, eight to ten.

In some bronzes, the intensity of the actual combat is very skilfully demonstrated by the metalsmith. All the icons show the eight-armed Durga piercing the barrel-shaped body of the buffalo demon who is depicted with an upturned neck or lying completely flat at the Devi's foot. Most craftsmen seem to have followed the above-mentioned text closely in the execution of this form, for almost all the bronze images show a man emerging from the decapitated trunk of the buffalo demon. This was a later feature, as is clearly evident not only from a comparison with the early masterpieces of classical style bronzes of Lakshana Devi and Shakti Devi from Brahmaur and Chhatrarhi which were cast during King Meruvarman's

reign around 700 A.D. The execution of these images is different from our images and closer to earlier sculptures from other parts of the country, all of which show the Great Goddess stamping her foot on the defeated buffalo-demon's head and holding him by his tail.

The life size superbly cast metal statues enshrined in the ancient temples of Brahmaur, Chhatrarhi and Chamba are the direct descendants of the Gupta sculptural tradition which by the 7th century A.D. had imbibed some Kashmiri influence. The statuesque dignity and accomplished modelling of the sculptures of Lakshana Devi, Shakti Devi, the Shiva bust, Ganesha, Nandi the sacred vahana of Shiva facing the Manimahesh temple in Brahmaur, Narasimha, Harirai and the Gauri-Shankar group have already received accolades from the scholars and connoisseurs of Himalayan art the world over. Each one of these images is simply unique in conception and execution. But I have specially singled out the Narasimha image as being an outstanding specimen in the history of Indian metal sculptures. Its creator, the master metalsmith in the employ of Chamba Raja Yugakaravarman, was certainly familiar with the iconographic tenets of the Vishnudharmottara purana which men-

6. Four-armed Durga, Madhya Pradesh. 20th century.

tions this form. The convention observed here is the complete absence of the depiction of the ayudhas in the hands of the god. Instead, the hand gestures are used to convey the same idea. The man-lion incarnation is seated on the lion-throne (Simhasana) in a very impressive posture—the manual gestures of the upper pair of arms convey the idea of his wielding the Sudarshana chakra (disc) and the sankha (conch) and his lower pair of arms are positioned in such a manner as to suggest that the hands are resting on the tip of the gada (mace). Although the tradition assigns this sculpture to the 10th century, it combines the elements of early Gupta and Kashmiri-Gandhara sculptural traditions; this is more evident in the treatment of the crown. The creator's familiarity with the textual prescription of the Vishnudharmottara purana combined with his training in Gupta-Kashmiri sculptural art enables one to assign it the date of the 7th century A.D. This is a unique specimen indeed amongst all the Narasimha sculptures.

Our bronzes, especially the ones from Punjab and Himachal Pradesh are akin to the Durga Mahishasuramardini image enshrined in the Markula Devi temple in Udaipur village, Lahul, which has been placed in the 16th century on the basis of the inscription on its pedestal. I have not been able to find out when this version came to be used for illustration by pahari metal craftsmen. Quite a few folk versions of this theme bear a striking resemblance to the Markula Devi image, on which basis they may be dated to the 16th or 17th century.

A number of images are available, each one fashioned in a distinctive manner. This accounts for the wide variety of bronzes, each one different from another. The eight-armed goddess victorious over the buffalo-demon is all face and arms. The expression on her triangular or oval face with stylised features is of great beauty with a mysterious air of detachment radiating an intense inner feeling of strength. In some images, the size of her head is much larger than her body plus thighs. Some images display the goddess as having a slab-like body and wire-shaped limbs; her skirt is modelled along her tubular legs in others or her diminutive body is encased from waist downwards in an ornamental wire technique skirt. Her face is all aglow with an eternal smile that reminds me of the Devi masks from Kulu. In a few bronzes, a certain grotesqueness is heightened by abnormally short legs. Her lion vehicle almost invariably shown on the left side

is a silent onlooker; only very few bronzes show him taking part in the fight. While all the images show the three prongs of her trident thrust into the neck or back of the animal, the pose of the Great Goddess is not always aggressive nor does she appear ferocious. On the contrary, she has a gentle and archaic smile on her mask-like face. In some bronzes, emphasis is laid on the "ease and effortless grace with which the divine act of retribution is carried out"[2] (to borrow a sentence from J.N. Banerjee). All the images portray the dynamic vigour accompanying the slaying. The turetted or high pinnacled crown worn by Durga in the folk bronzes from Himacnal Pradesh was first seen in a metal image recovered from Peshawar. By the 7th and 8th centuries A.D., this crown had become a common feature of all the sculptures in stone and metal from north-western frontier area, Kashmir and what is known as the State of Himachal today. In the mediaeval and post-mediaeval periods, this crown became a regular feature of all types of images, both classical and folk style, from the pahari areas. The Mahishasuramardini images from Gujarat share most of the features of Himachal bronzes. The prabhavali, the Great Goddess standing victorious over the defeated Mahisha, the human being emerging out of the demon's body and his decapitated head held in the goddess's hands by hair, etc., all the iconographic features are exactly identical. The only difference is that the figure of the goddess is not distorted nor reduced to a triangular form, but is more naturalistically modelled. Her crown and the physiognomic features such as broad face, full checks, prominent jawline etc. are typically Gujarati. The identical iconographic treatment suggests that perhaps the craftsmen of Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat were guided by the same texts.

All the bronze images discussed above have two distinctive features which relate them to classical style bronzes, viz. the prabhavali (aureole) and the pitha (pedestal). The former is almost always elliptical in shape the inspiration for which came from the curvilinear Shikhara of stone temples from northern and western India. The top of the prabhavali is crowned by ornamental arches rising up in several tiers and diminishing in size as they go up to the finial or are decorated with stylised spirals and floral motifs and surmounted by a kalasha and a finial. The pedestal is always rectangular in

2. Banerjee, J.N.: The Development of Hindu Iconography, Calcutta. 1956. p. 141.

shape resembling the local temple plinths and stands a few inches above ground. The whole conception being that the deity is enshrined in a temple. The aureole and the pedestal are not a distinctive feature of Durga Mahishamardini images alone. Images of Shiva and Parvati, Vishnu, Vishnu and Lakshmi and other deities are similarly framed, as we shall see here-below. We have seen quite a few Durga Mahishamardini images without the prabhavali. In such images, the Goddess's eight arms are arranged in such a way that we seem to see the elliptical shape of the aureole in our mental eyes. The eye is led up from the figure of the vanquished buffalo demon across both the arms and the attributes wielded in the hands to the top of the Devi's crown which is fashioned almost like a temple finial.

In all these images, the human organism is experienced from within. Welling from an interior life centre, a current pervades and animates the body, pressing out against the surface and pervading the sensitively modelled limbs. The frame of the aureole is not allowed to dominate the figure of the deity, on the contrary it throws her into relief. The material itself gives up its quality of metal and is transubstantiated into life. Durga riding on the back of a lion or the Simhavahini form of Durga and Mahakali are also early iconic types. The Mahakali bronzes show her in standing or seated postures, wearing a garland of skulls, the third eye incised in the centre of her forehead and a weird mocking smile on her face, holding the severed head of a demon by hair, a cup containing blood etc. This ferocious aspect of the Great Goddess Durga inspires awe. Most of these images are roundly modelled; the broad powerful shoulders of the goddess convey an impression of energy. Some of them are of tribal inspiration. The basic primeval rhythms have been admirably captured in these as well as the images of Durga Simhavahini. A crude and primitively modelled image of Simhavahini suggests tribal heritage. Her lion vehicle has striking affinities with terracotta figures, its body is incised with criss-cross lines which contrast with the vertical and oblique lines on the goddess's garment. It will be noticed that even in the execution of such apparently crude and weird images, the metalsmith expended so much loving care and precision in working on minute details such as the shape of the crown decorated with pellets, the ornaments on the ears, nose, neck, arms and legs, the girdle around the waist, etc. Symbols and attributes are not

forgotten either. These images are technically as perfect as a classical style bronze. Other images representing this form of Durga display smoothly executed and polished limbs of the goddess as well as her mount who is often portrayed as roaring, his tongue lolling out, a fierce expression on its face which is matched by the same expression on Durga's face.

The masks or plaques of Durga and Shiva are made mainly in Kulu, Mandi, Simla Hills and Chamba where they are carried in processions in gaily decorated palanquins at the time of religious festivals. In Kulu, during the navaratra festival, on all the nine days these masks are carried on sedan chair-like palanquins all around the village and on the tenth day, i.e. the day of Dussehra festival, all the palanquins are brought from neighbouring villages to Kulu town for the final procession. In Simla hills, these masks are taken out in procession on the annual fair of Phag and the jatra is carried out in Rampur.The Shiva-ratri festival and the Minjar fair are similarly celebrated in Mandi and Chamba respectively.

The most prolific production centre of these masks is the Kulu district; that is why the common appellation coined for them is "Kulu mask". Each mask is a token of thanksgiving. It is consecrated by the temple priest and the shaman talks through the mask answering questions which have been put to the deity. Each village has its own masks of Durga, Shiva and their attendant divinities. It is believed that they also inspect the harvest. These masks are preserved in the temple treasury and taken out only on specific religious festivals. No one except the priest may touch them, for a certain amount of sanctity is attached to them. The village metalworkers are commissioned to cast them by temple management committee or village headman.

Variously known as kirttimukha or Devi masks (mohra), they are made of brass. In fact, they are plaques showing the crowned head of the Great Goddess Durga worshipped as Devi all over the state of Himachal and terminating horizontally below the breast. The crown worn by the goddess is always a three or five pointed tiara. It shall be noticed that this feature is common to all classical style sculptures in stone and bronze all over this province. The face, always moulded in high relief, has an eternal smile stamped on it and displays three eyes. On the chest one generally sees a necklace formed by a pair of serpents, symbols of

plenty and fertility. Breasts are suggested by nubbins of metal in very low relief. Similar masks of Shiva are also made in this area, although they are not so well known. The treatment of the face and other details are exactly identical, except for the fact that the god is always shown as sporting a thick moustache and long hair.

In the centuries gone by, these metal plaques were offered to the gods as votive gifts. Masks were worn so that the voice of the gods could be heard and their images portraying ideal beauty were made. The treatment of the face clearly reveals that originally such masks were made in classical style. This is evident from the mask of Mujuni Devi dating from the 8th century A.D. discovered from Nirmand in southern Kulu district.[3] The style does not seem to have undergone much transformation in the course of centuries in the hands of the rural metal-workers. The masks now available certainly show an amalgamation of classical and rural styles. These mohras are still being made in various villages of Kulu district, especially in Saraj.

3. See Coomaraswamy, A.K.: History of Indian and Indonesian Art, Dover edition, 1965. Pl. XCI. Fig. 273.

J. Leroy Davidson has referred to these mohras as the Mujuni Devi masks.[4] I think this nomenclature is incorrect. The name of Mujuni Devi is mentioned in the inscription engraved on the metal plaque. It is not clear whether the name designates the goddess or the queen of Nirmand. Till this mystery is solved, it would not be wise to use this name for these masks.

All these masks are cast in a peculiar manner. Pieces of wax in long thin strips are placed together on the form and pressed together. This wax model is then covered with clay and cast. The ribbed effect is obtained by not smoothing the wax strips.

In Rajasthan are made tiny metal images of Saraswati, goddess of learning, very different from her classical style portrayals. Her bell-shaped skirt forms a kind of pedestal. Her feet are not shown. The entire treatment of the figure suggests that these images had their prototypes in the terracotta figurines of the Mother Goddess. She holds a vina in her hands. Her facial features and expression have striking

4. Davidson, J. Le Roy: Art of the Indian Subcontinent from Los Angeles Collections, 1968, UCLA Art galleries, USA. Pp. 103.

affinities with the terracotta and metal heads of Parvati worshipped during the Gangaur festival

Shiva is worshipped in his diverse forms, all of which have been delineated in the folk bronzes. His most widely worshipped form is the columnar one known as the Lingam. In Rajasthan and Maharashtra, a large variety of Mukhalingas are cast in metal, some depicting the moustached face of Shiva on the upper half portion shaded by a cobra hood rising above, while others are formed in the shape of the lingam but the whole image looks like a large head. All of them belong to the Ekamukhalinga variety. I have not seen a Mukhalinga with more than one head. They were used to cover the stone lingas, that is why they are hollow from inside. The symbols of Lingam and Yoni are often placed on top.

Some images show him standing in frontal pose with a slight bend on a pedestal and surrounded by an elaborate prabhavali crowned by an umbrella-like circular disc (Chhatra) and a finial. The pedestal (pitha) usually of two or more horizontal layers is modelled on the temple plinths or the Vedic altars meant for sacrificial fire. Both the prabhavali and pitha are of classical inspiration and lend a touch of elegance to the otherwise crude images. Shiva is two or four armed, sporting a jatamukuta and accompanied by Nandi, his mount.

Shiva is portrayed along with his consort Parvati in a number of images. In these Uma-Maheshvara-murtis, Parvati is shown seated on the left thigh of her consort who is caressing her with one of his hands. Their respective mounts, a bull and a lion, are carved on the pedestal on which rest their legs. Their postures are always suggestive and show the attempt of the folk metalsmiths from Himachal Pradesh to portray an orthodox hieratic motif in his own way. Such images, akin to classical style bronzes, display conventional treatment. Sometimes both the deities are seated on the back of Nandi or are placed on a yoni with a raised pedestal or on a lingam resting on a low pedestal. The head-gear, ornaments, and the garments of the divine figures are convincingly displayed. One of the bronzes is so finely executed that I am immediately reminded of the superb life-size statues of Gauri-Shankar enshrined in the temple located in the Lakshmi-Narayan complex. The prabhavali seems to have been inspired by this image, but the metalsmith has displayed his talent in a

number of liberties taken in its execution. The figures of devotees with folded hands and two figures of Ganesha depicted on the prabhavali, the depiction of a small figure seated in anjali mudra on the pedestal in front of Shiva and Parvati, etc. The bronze, highly finished, is the very epitome of technical perfection.

In sharp contrast we have crude uncouth rendering of this theme with unusually large faces of the deities while the rest of their bodies seem to submerge into the body of Nandi. The deep penetrating expression is enhanced by their staring eyes and open mouth.

The most impressive variety among these images are those of Sadashiva, that is, Shiva with five heads which primarily represent the five aspects of the god, viz. Sadyojata, Vamadeva, Aghora, Tatpurusha and Ishana. These images are available in the round as well as in relief. The relief images show the entire figure of the god occupying the stele. The god's five crowned heads, crude and delineated in a row, are placed on his triangular torso resting on two short legs. In his two arms he holds a shield and a sword. The form is simplified. The free standing images in the round show identical execution of the form. The weird expression on the faces is enhanced by pellet-like eyes. The god is shown riding on Nandi placed on a flat base. The animal is equally crudely fashioned. The facial expression of the god is not very distinctive but its lack of character seems to be much compensated by the vigorous expression of the sacred bull. The god is always shown clad in a dhoti indicated through oblique lines on the legs, and ornaments and girdle are not forgotten.

An unusual specimen is a lingam with a broad circular base rising up in three tiers and diminishing gradually in size. The circular top resembles a common phallus; the second tier shows four stylised tridents in the cardinal directions; on the third tier we see five effigy-like figures supposed to be representing five aspects of Shiva known as Panchabhuteshvara. Each figure is carrying a staff or a trident. No other details are indicated except the pellet-like eyes, the sacrificial thread and a girdle around the waist. On the base are delineated the symbols associated with Shiva, i.e. Nandi, his mount, and a cobra.

The most vigorous expression is conveyed by a very unusual theme attempted by the pahari

village craftsman. The representation of goddess Kali in conjugation with Shiva was a favourite theme with pahari painters, but never attempted in metal images. It certainly provided its creator vast dramatic possibilties. It is a remarkable illustration of the legend narrated in the description of plates. The composite image shows the goddess Kali standing on the prostrate body of Shiva. The facial features of the divine couple are identical; the noses are curved and beak-shaped, while the expression on Shiva's face is one of calm tranquillity, the goddess's face exudes a strange expression of subjugation, humility and wrathful pride, for she had just stopped killing the demons in great fury. The image conceived in three-dimensional terms has volume, weight, drammatic expression and vibrant energy.

The metalworkers of Nasik in Maharashtra produce a special kind of metal images for which we may use the terms "miniature Linga shrines". On a flat square or circular metal dish are arranged several deities around the emblems of Shiva, a lingam-yoni and Nandi placed in the centre. Apart from Ganesha who figures on all such images, the deities represented all around the central symbols may be Durga Mahishamardini, Annapurna, Karttikeya, the sun, the moon, Hanuman and Bhairava. The whole composition is crowded with their tiny figures. The deities are easily identified by their attributes. All the details are worked out with great precision even in such diminutive images. The inspiration for such images probably came from the Panchayatana images worshipped by the Smartas or from identical enclosed spaces commonly to be seen in Hindu temples. A spout is almost always provided for draining the liquid from lustration rites.

The Surya images cast in the rural areas of the provinces under study follow the conventional iconographic traits prevalent all over northern India. The god is shown standing in a chariot driven by seven horses. Aruna being the charioteer seated in front. All the figures are placed on a raised pedestal. The god always has a crown (the Kiritamukuta) on his head, is clad in a dhoti tied around his waist by a girdle clasped in front and wears the usual ornaments. He as well as his charioteer are framed by a prabhavali, the shape of which may be circular or elliptical. Surya is holding lotus flowers in his hands. The figures are somewhat crude in style and execution. The gentle and sweet expression on Surya's face is beautified by a faint

smile and the excellent modelling of the whole composition endow it with a unique charm. Some folk bronzes display daring treatment; the horses of the Sun god have been abstracted in the manner of seven dots.

The Vishnu images are equally profuse. The god is represented singly or along with his consort Lakshmi perched on his Garuda mount. The images are completely free standing and three-dimensional or provided with an elaborate and effulgent prabhavali. The prabhavali, elliptical or rectangular in shape, is decorated with stylised lotus petal motif all over. It encloses or is surmounted by the Siraschakra in the form of a full blown lotus which always forms a kind of nimbus at the back of the deity's head. Vishnu, always four armed, wields his usual weapons, Shankha (conch), Chakra (discus), Gada (mace) and Padma (lotus) and is shown seated on a raised padmasana (lotus throne) or riding on his Garuda mount and sometimes in standing posture. He is placed on a flat rectangular base or a raised pedestal in two or three tiers. The prabhavali, the siraschakra and the plinth-like pedestal all contribute to the classical look of these images, although the figures of the deities are executed in folk style. It is difficult to say whether these images are modelled on classical style bronzes or the source of inspiration for the latter were folk bronzes which perpetuated the tradition over the centuries. But these features lend remarkable dignity and elegance to the folk bronzes. One of the bronzes shows Vishnu standing in Samapadasthanaka pose, exactly as in classical style images. He is flanked by two female figures Shri and Pushti, much smaller in size; perhaps this was intended to lend prominence to the god. Images of this type, albeit executed in folk style, are tastefully disposed and contain many traits of classical style. The figures of the god and the accompanying deities are gracefully modelled.

The deities are often shown wearing elaborate ornaments, a large Vanamala, a crown and a dhoti (loin cloth). In some images, Vishnu's head is canopied by the hoods of the serpent Shesha or Ananta who rears its head in front of the god in other images. Some bronze images display the distorted limbs and very crude facial features of the god, nonetheless they exude primitive vitality. While all the ten incarnations of Vishnu find expression in other forms of folk art, we see only the portrayals of Narasimha and Krishna in folk bronzes.

The very mention of the word "Narasimha" evokes in our mind the picture of the metal statue of this god enshrined in the temple of that god at Brahmaur located in the upper reaches of Chamba in Himachal Pradesh. But the folk style images of Narasimha, the composite form of man and lion, do not seem to have been inspired by this masterpiece. The village metalsmith has chosen the moment when the terrific apparition of the man-lion rushes forth from the split pillar to seize Hiranyakashipu who, taken unawares and with the mocking taunt still on his lips, is felled on his knees and killed. The god is not shown engaged in combat. The split pillar is visible behind the shoulders of Narasimha whose claws are dug into the demon's body lying prostrate on the god's knees. This imagery was common in the pahari villages, as is evident from the manuscript illuminations painted in folk style especially in Chamba, Basohli and Jammu. This bronze is indeed a masterpiece in folk style. One cannot help being impressed by the technical strength and imaginative power manifest in the treatment of the theme.

Krishna, the divine lover, was the favourite of classical and folk artists, for his romantic and heroic exploits titillated their imagination, but these themes were more suitable for pictorial expression or sculptural reliefs. Due to limitations of material, the depiction of Krishna themes was reduced to the portrayal of Venugopala, the flute player Krishna, and Balagopala, the baby Krishna, crawling on his knees and carrying a circular object interpreted as a ball of butter. Both these forms were popular in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The metalsmiths of these provinces have displayed ramarkable skill in graceful modelling, while they adhered to the conventional treatment of Venugopala who is always shown in standing posture, his left leg crossing over to the right one and resting on that side. On the other hand, the Krishna bronzes from Himachal Pradesh display greater freedom of expression, simplicity, spontaneity and daringly unconventional treatment. The pahari folk bronzes show Krishna seated in lalitasana on a bell-shaped pedestal or a footstool with a circular base and playing on the flute resting on his lips. The enraptured expression on the face and half-closed eyes and the slightly slanting angle of the seated figure convey that he is completely enthralled and held spellbound by his music. Krishna is always shown as sporting a crown (Kiritamukuta) and a sacrificial thread (yajnopavita). His body is always graceful,

slender and sometimes elongated. Some Venugopala images are characterised by a sublime expression on the divine face and this trait singles them out as the finest specimens of folk bronzes. The comparison of these images with Krishna bronzes from other provinces brings into sharp focus the contrast between the iconographic continuity and stylistic variation. The baby Krishna is said to have been very mischievous; according to the legend, he loved to steal butter. This legend caught the imagination of Indian artists, particularly the village craftsmen who used their favourite theme for individual interpretation within the framework of local tradition. The smooth limbed baby Krishna addressed as Balagopala or Laddugopala is shown crawling on all threes and holds aloft his fourth hand carrying a butter ball. Very crude and grotesque execution has been noticed in the folk versions of this theme. These images stand in sharp contrast to the finely delineated bronzes.

Tiny images of Radha and Krishna made of lead have come down to us from Rajasthan. Both the figures are placed on a flat pedestal. Dressed in traditional costumes, Krishna is clad in a dhoti with rhythmic folds, his yellow scarf (Pitambara) is thrown over his shoulders, a Kiritamukuta adorning his head and Radha is dressed in the traditional dress of the Rajput women : a choli (blouse) and a long skirt; a veil is thrown over her head and shoulders. Both are decorated with the usual ornaments, and standing in conventional pose. Krishna looks more like Venugopala. Identical figures were commonly seen in Rajasthani miniatures and terracotta figurines. The flat treatment of the figures robs them of their three-dimensional quality.

The large number of Garuda images from various parts of Rajasthan especially Mewar, and Himachal Pradesh testifies to the sway of Vaishnava cult there. No doubt, the chief source of inspiration in Rajasthan was the massive image of this vahana of Vishnu facing the Jagannath temple in Udaipur city and in Himachal Pradesh the huge metal image surmounting a column in front of the Lakshmi-Narayan temple entrance, but the rural metal-workers tried to portray an orthodox hieratic motif in their own way, as is evident from a study of his bronzes. Most images portray him as the mount and the emblem of Vishnu or as half-human and half-bird, that is, a round-eyed human being with the wings of a bird and a curved beak-like nose and sometimes his legs

nave the claws of a bird. Always depicted in conventional manner, he is shown as having two arms, his hands being joined in the Anjali pose. In spite of these conventional features common to all statuettes, each image is unique in itself. Garuda is always shown as sporting a crown which is in the local style of the province, that is, three, five or seven-pointed tiara in Himachal Pradesh, sometimes surmounted by a serpent whose enemy and queller Garuda is. In Rajasthan, the crown is shaped as the kiritamukuta described in our ancient iconographical texts. Sometimes he is provided with a halo from which peer two heads of the birds and two lotus buds are seen beside his knees. If the image of Garuda is provided with a shaft on top of the halo that means the image was intended to be Vishnu's mount into whose image the shaft was fitted. If the shaft is missing, the image was intended to be an emblem of Vishnu. The form in these images is always simplified and the execution is enriched by chasing technique. The smooth limbs of his lithe body seem to melt into each other. He is always shown dressed in a dhoti and part of his garment functions as a support.

Ganesha is a popular household protective deity in northern India. In the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, the main entrance to each and every residential house displays his figure in seated posture in the central niche of the door lintel. This is in keeping with the traditional belief that this harbinger of good luck and remover of all kinds of obstacles would ward off all evils befalling the inmates of the building. His metal images in folk style naturally were accorded a pride of place at the household altars besides the image of the principal deity, for he had to be propitiated before each and every undertaking. His folk versions belong to the seated variety, having two or four arms. He wields a hatchet (parashu), a sweetmeat (modaka), a rosary and an elephant-goad (Ankusha) in his hands. His elephant head and his large protruding pot-belly are some of his usual iconographic features, the latter being emphasised by the sacred thread formed by a snake crossing over the belly. He is invariably accompanied by his rat vehicle, the tiny figure placed near the god's feet on the raised pedestal. Some bronzes are provided with an elliptical shaped prabhavali very similar in style to those of Durga Mahishamardini and Vishnu.

In some bronze images, the figure of Ganesha and the frame of the stele are overlaid with or translated into wire shapes. His bulky body has

the shape of a buckled shield set up on top of serpent-like coiled legs. His trunk is stick-like and connects the part between nose and sweetmeats.

The bronze images of Hanuman are abundantly available in a variety of poses. What strikes one immediately about them is the unconventional treatment of form and content. In classical art, Hanuman figures either in the Ramayana illustrations or when shown singly, he is always presented as carrying a mountain and a mace. But the folk metalsmith presents us with a richer variety of images of this popular god. There are images of Hanuman in standing posture showing assertively modelled figures in the round. They take on a dramatic flavour especially through the posture, the enlargement of the eyes, the open mouth displaying the side teeth and rather expressionistic stylisation. It seems that the god is advancing forward to attack someone. Some images in this posture display well modelled limbs and broad powerful shoulders, while in others there is a striving towards simple plasticity and greater simplification that eliminates all details.

An unusual image from Himachal Pradesh shows a figure of Hanuman seated on a stool. The facial features of the crowned god are akin to those of deities depicted in the miniature Linga shrines from Maharashtra mentioned above. The face and torso are much bigger than the legs. Pellets are used in the place of eyes, beads of the necklace and the girdle. The mace held in one of his hands looks like a staff. The whole figure is marked by simplicity of form, elegance of curves and feeling for organic synthesis.

Another remarkable bronze image shows the slender elongated figure of Hanuman seated on a flat rectangular base. The elbows of his slim arms are resting on the angular knees and he is holding two circular objects in his hands, the position of which suggests they are fruits which he is about to eat. Probably it is an illustration of the story of his long vain search for Sita in Lanka, after which he sat down on a tree to satiate his hunger by eating fruits. The harmonious perfection of its finely modelled figure and stylisation place it at the apogee of folk art, of which it constitutes the most complete expression. Superb in workmanship, it stands apart from all other artistic efforts.

Nasik in Maharashtra has yielded us Hanuman

images in the most impressive and rhythmic poses. These bronzes are distinguished from other images by the treatment of the god's tail which either forms a kind of spiral or an arch around the god's figure resembling the prabhavali. Hanuman is always shown in a posture which gives us an impression of dance movement from the disposition of his legs and arms. We come across identical pose of this god in classical style stone carvings from a number of South Indian temples.* Even where Hanuman is portrayed in conventional pose, carrying a mountain and a mace, the village craftsmen seem to have endowed his images with unique force and powerful execution. These figures are modelled in a simple but effective and expressive manner. The arms and legs are reduced to cylindrical forms while the body is slightly flattened. The face is deliberately elongated in some cases which contributes to its weird look. It resembles rural and tribal masks of the same deity from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The stylised drooping eyes resemble the yoni encircling a lingam. Tribal heritage is evident in these images.

* See K.C. Aryan & Subhashini Aryan. Hanuman in Art & Mythology, Rekha Prakashan, Delhi 1975. Plates 98-108.

I have already mentioned that ancestor worship played an important role in the lives of villagers from all Indian provinces. The metal images cast for this purpose are mainly equestrian figurines and village hero images which I collected in large numbers from Rajasthan. The village hero images are generally never more than three to four inches in height and display flattened bodies, very elementary in form. Only the heads are treated in some detail The eyes are pellet-like or deep hollows which appear to gaze at the beholder. The arms are raised in a ritual gesture; sometimes they are shown holding a sword and a shield in the hands. The figures are supported by a pedestal.

The heroic horseman who, in folklore, is always equated with feudal Rajputs has always fascinated the rural metalworkers of Rajasthan and Gujarat, as also other provinces of our country. The equestrian images are the visual equivalents of Spirit riders, folk heroes, clan ancestors and warriors such as Gugga Chauhan, each of whom has his own locale, myths and rites. These images were an integral and focal point of rituals connected with ancestor worship.

The equestrian figurines always show a horse with a rider on its back. Although the legs of the horse are always firmly planted on the ground, it always seems to be advancing forward. The rider mounts the horse with or without stirrups and his legs adhere to the body of the horse and do not exceed the length of the saddle. The reins, arms and weapons enhance the airiness and forward movement of the figures. With one hand, the rider with a raised head and straight back, holds the reins and in the other a staff or some weapon. The suggestion of movement is conveyed through the position of the legs, neck and head of the animal as well as by the body posture of the rider who is always shown inclining forward. Completely three-dimensional and free standing images, they are completely self-contained. Some images display massive full-bodied horses and riders, while in others we see slim, slender and elegant groups. The riders' faces are sometimes naturalistically modelled and sometimes have abstract features with a pinched nose. The horse's legs are flexed and well articulated, sometimes we come across sturdy cylinders. Each group is expressively and sensitively modelled.

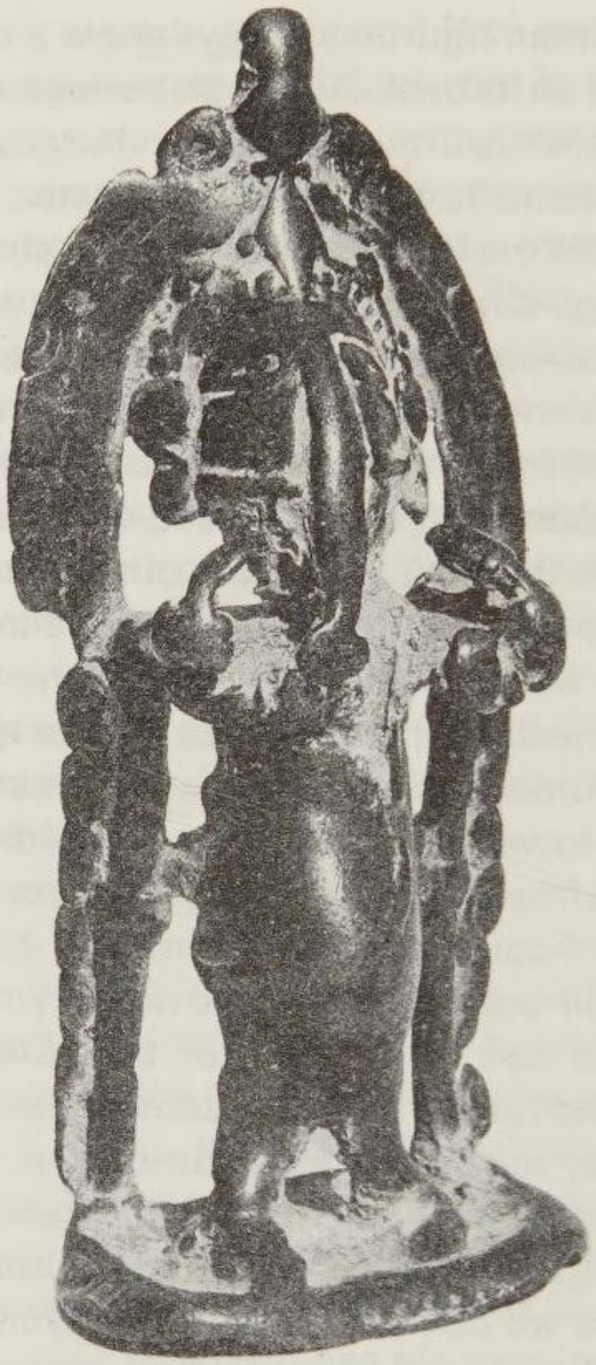
The animal bronzes comprise mainly the vahanas (mounts) of the Hindu deities, the commonest among them being the horses, elephants, Nandi the bull; and sometimes images of cows symbolising Surabhi, the cow of plenty, are also available, but these are not very common. They do not fall into the category of what has been termed the "animal style" in the western sense of the term. These images are big or small according to their function. If they are intended to be placed in front of the village shrine, they are large in size; if meant for a small wayside shrine or household worship, they are small in size. In some cases, their proportions are exaggerated, especially the legs of the horses in equestrian images or of Nandi the sacred bull of Shiva, for they suggest the animal's potential power. Superbly cast by lost wax process, these images have flat stylised features; some are very crude but highly expressive. Some of these images are also used for religious processions.

It is a pity that a rich treasure of bronzes has been lost due to an attitude of indifference and neglect. Some exquisite specimens have been fed into the furnace by urban metal workers for making domestic utensils. The antique dealers have coined a rather uncomplimentary term 'jungli' for these bronzes which shows how

blind they are to their import.

The new age of industry has destroyed the organic unity between the craftsman and his product which had so long obtained unself-consciously. In Rajasthan, Gujarat and Nasik in Maharashtra, they are being mass produced and this mass production has robbed them of all their traditional qualities. They look insipid products, inartistic, devoid of aesthetic merit. Only in Himachal Pradesh I observed that the craftsmen who cast the Kirttimukha masks often make two or three copies of the same design, one of which may be offered to the local shrine for worship and religious processions, while the other replicas are kept at home which serve as models to the younger generations. I collected duplicates and triplicates of several metal images from various places.

On the whole, the production of folk bronzes has been reduced as a vigorous force because of changes in social structure and economic life.



7. Standing Ganesh, Himachal Pradesh. 16th century.

A note on the casting process

In India, the bronze images are cast by lost wax, what is better known as cire perdue process, or by sand process. The former is more popular. The tradition of casting metal figurines by using wax moulds dates back to hoary antiquity, as has been amply testified by the superbly cast bronze figurine of the dancing girl from Mohenjodaro (3500 B.C.) possessing remarkable finish.

A number of ancient treatises in Sanskrit contain a detailed account of the lost wax process of casting known as Madhucchista-vidhanam in the vernacular,[1] among them we may mention the Manasara (chap. LXVIII), the Samaranganasutradhara, the Yuktikalpataru, Manasollasa or Abhilashitartha Chintamani by King Somesvara Bhulokamala of Western Chalukya dynasty of Kalyan near Bombay who reigned in the 12th cen. A.D. These all are mediaeval texts, written prior to the 12th century A.D. and containing useful information on the subject. The following passage from the Vishnu Samhita (chapter XIV) suggests that the lost wax process was more widely practised : "If a metal image is to be made, it must first be made of wax and then coated with earth; gold and silver and other metals are purified and cast into the mould and a complete image is thus obtained by capable workmen."[2] There was another reason for preferring this process. From the virtually limitless plastic possibilities afforded the craftsmen by the use of beeswax flows a cascade of metal sequences formed by units of design whose recurrence has so often been noted in the decoration of objects. Mastery over this technique enabled the metalworkers to interpret their vision with greater plastic dynamism.

In the towns and villages of India where the lost wax process has been practised for centuries and is still a living tradition, the metalworkers have devised an infinite variety of techniques which it is not possible to recount here. We can only mention two methods of this process known as the solid casting and the hollow casting. These two processes are used in the same manner all over the world. It revolves round the mechanical replacement of an object origi-

1. Banerjee, J.N : The Development of Hindu Iconography, Calcutta 1956 p. 214.

2. Vishnu Samhita as quoted by Ruth Reeves: Cire Perdue Casting in India, New Delhi, 1962. p. 32.

nally modelled in bees-wax or a wax-like substance by metal.

In ancient India, as we learn from various treatises, both the solid and hollow casting techniques of the lost wax process were employed by metal workers everywhere. Nowadays, the solid casting technique is widely practised all over Southern India. In the North, the early bronzes from Kashmir, Chamba and other areas of Himachal Pradesh also appear to have been fashioned by the solid casting method. This is true of both classical and folk style images. The same is the case of Jain bronzes which have come down to us in large numbers from Rajasthan and Gujarat. The North Indian metal workers chisel and hammer the images after casting them with a view to give them a finished and smooth look.

The folk bronzes of North-Western region of India, be they free standing three-dimensional or two-dimensional images, are cast by the solid casting method of the lost wax process. This is more true of metal images from Rajasthan and Nasik in Maharashtra. In all the provinces falling in our area of study, the wax model used for casting the metal image is fashioned in the same manner as the terracotta figurine. In the case of three-dimensional images in bronze, it is a notable fact that the metal worker devoted maximum attention to the front portion and left the back side unfinished, that is, all the details of garments, ornaments, attributes and other accessories are worked out with utmost care. The reason for this was not sheer negligence or carelessness on the part of the craftsmen, but the simple idea that since the image was meant purely for worship, it was meant to be seen only from the front, not from the back side.

As already mentioned, in these areas three-dimensional as well as two-dimensional flat plaque-like images are made. Among the latter are included the Kirttimukha masks from Kulu and Simla hills and identical images cast in relief.

In most centres of metal craft, the craftsmen practise and are equally adept at both the lost wax as well as the sand process of casting. Generally smaller images are cast by the latter method. In most cases, the artisans choose their own problems and select the method most suitable for the occasion.

Herebelow is given a description of the lost wax

process. First a model in clay slightly smaller than the intended size of the finished work is made. Then it is covered with a continuous layer of wax which is modelled with all the details required on the finished bronze. This is then covered with layers of fine clay to make a one-piece mould. When heated, the wax flows out from between the mould and the core and the space left is filled with molten metal. This method has a disadvantage that if anything goes wrong during the casting, the original model is lost. To avoid this, the second method was devised in which a piece-mould is prepared. A full size model of the statue is built and sections of this are moulded using plaster of Paris. Separate pieces are made if there are any undercut areas, to permit removal of the piece-mould without damage to the model. The piece-mould is lined with wax and a core of a refractory material such as clay is constructed which is strengthened with an iron armature. The piece-mould is removed and a one-piece-mould is constructed around the core and wax as for the previous method. For both the methods, it is necessary to hold the core in position within the mould so that when the wax is melted out it does not shift. This is done by making the iron armature larger than the figure so that it extends into the mould or by sticking copper rods through the mould and wax and into the core. These can be cut flush with the metal surface after casting. Vent-holes are made in the mould to allow gases driven in front of the molten metal during the casting to escape. Normally bronze contains ten percent of tin in copper but compositions found in images vary considerably. Lead, zinc and brass were also used. The composition depended to a certain extent on the availability of materials. After casting, superfluous bronze is removed and the surface is polished with abrasives. Although initially bronze is red, it turns black as it ages. This process can be accelerated by rubbing the image with oil. Treatment with lime gives the bronze a green patina.

Small statues may be cast in solid bronze but the enormous weight of a large bronze statue and the amount of metal required for its manufacture encouraged the development of systems for hollow casting in which the statue has a thin shell surrounding a solid core of non-combustible material. This is achieved by pouring the molten metal into a narrow space between the core and a mould taken directly or indirectly from a model; after the metal has cooled and solidified the mould is removed.

In our area of study, we rarely come across bronzes cast by hollow casting technique. Eighty percent bronzes reproduced in this book are modelled in clay used in sand process. The exceptions are the Mukhalingas and some large size equestrian figurines which are always hollow from inside.

Instead of wax, the North Indian metal craftsman uses lacquer (lakh) for making the replica of the image to be cast and the final image is obtained through the sand process of casting. This process was largely practised by the artisans (Chitera) belonging to the goldsmith community. Other craftsmen who are in some way or the other connected with the goldsmiths find this process easier to work in, compared to the lost wax process. The lacquer is used in the same way as the wax. As far as I know, the sand process of casting has not been mentioned in any of our Silpa treatises. The tribals of Rajasthan have evolved their own methods and techniques of casting metal images of their deities. These techniques may appear primitive to a casual observer but are sophisticated to a high degree and deserve to be studied in greater depth.

The patina is also obtained by rubbing the image constantly with red sand mixed with water in a tub. The process of rubbing is repeated several times till the image acquires a smooth finish as though it had been polished by a buffing machine.

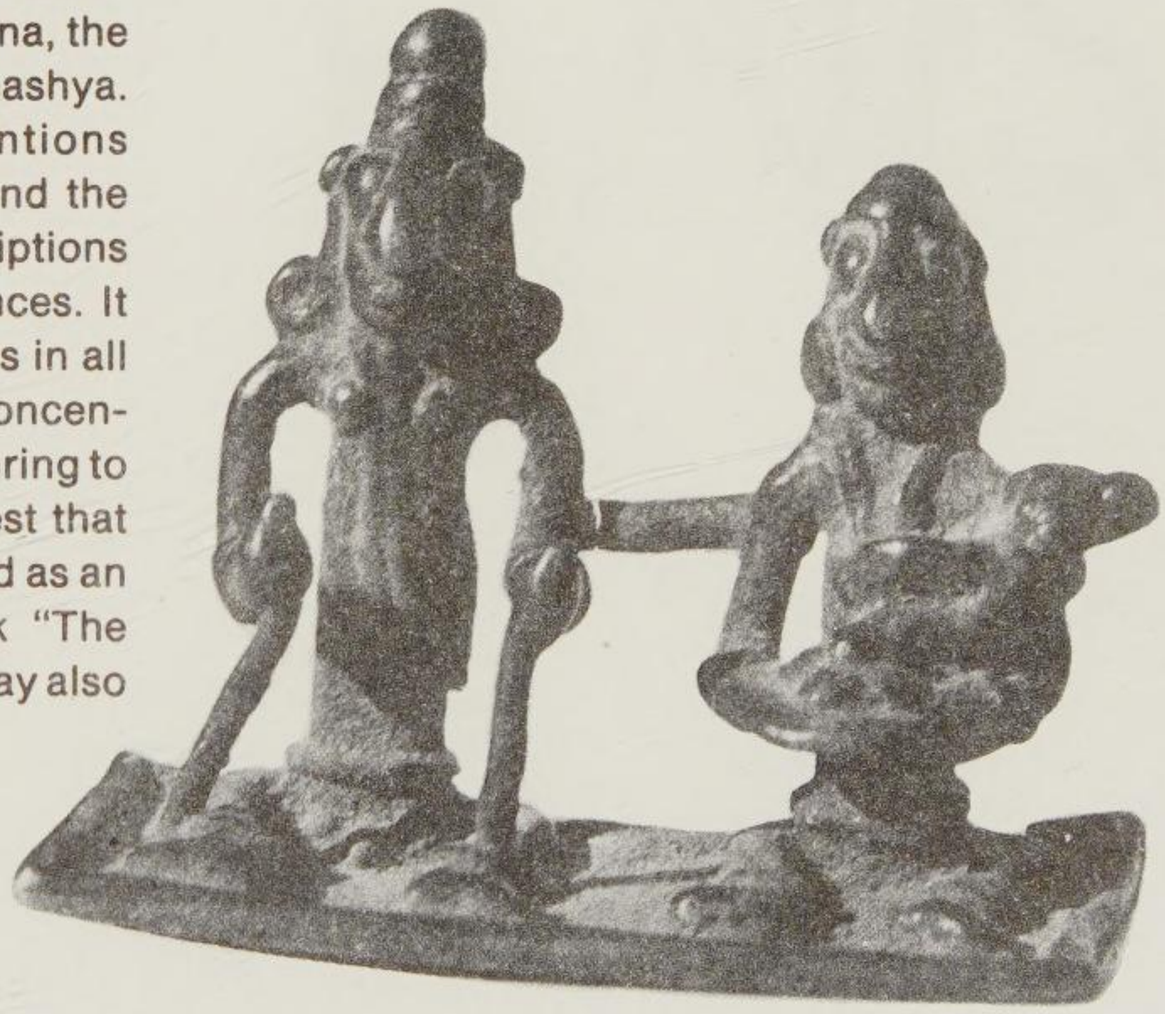
When the metal image has undergone all the stages of production and received the finishing touches, it is deemed to be ready for installation in the village shrine or household altar. The local pujari (priest) fixes an auspicious day and time for performing the ceremonial and purificatory rituals which includes the Prana-pratishtha ceremony accompanied by the ceremonial oblations, that is the image is consecrated and, by a symbolic rite, invested with the breath of life. And the divinity is installed in the image and embodied by its form and enshrined in the garbhagriha altar to the chanting of the holy mantras and is ready for worship.

The metal craftsmen's tools are the same everywhere in India. While the Hindi speaking areas use the same names, more or less identical names are used in other provinces and the same names are used with slight variations which occur due to local dialects. The lost wax process is practised all over the world and the

same methods are employed. Slight differences, however, may occur on account of the handling of the material.

If the reader desires to know more about the methods and techniques of casting processes as practised in different provinces of India, he may go through Ruth Reeves' book entitled "Cire Perdue Casting in India." A mine of information can be gleaned from ancient Sanskrit texts such as the Manasara, the Vishnu Samhita, the Samarangana Sutradhara, the Agni Purana, the Matsya Purana, the Yuktikalpataru and Patanjali's Mahabhashya. The Vishnudharmottara Purana mentions solid and hollow casting techniques and the Matsya Purana contains detailed descriptions of metal images and other appurtenances. It may be noted that the underlying stress in all the Sanskrit treatises is on the selfless concentration which the image-maker should bring to his work which further serves to suggest that casting the bronze images was regarded as an act of devotion. J.N. Banerjee's book "The Development of Hindu Iconography" may also be consulted for valuable information.

□



8. Gramadevatas, Rajasthan. 18th century.

PLATES

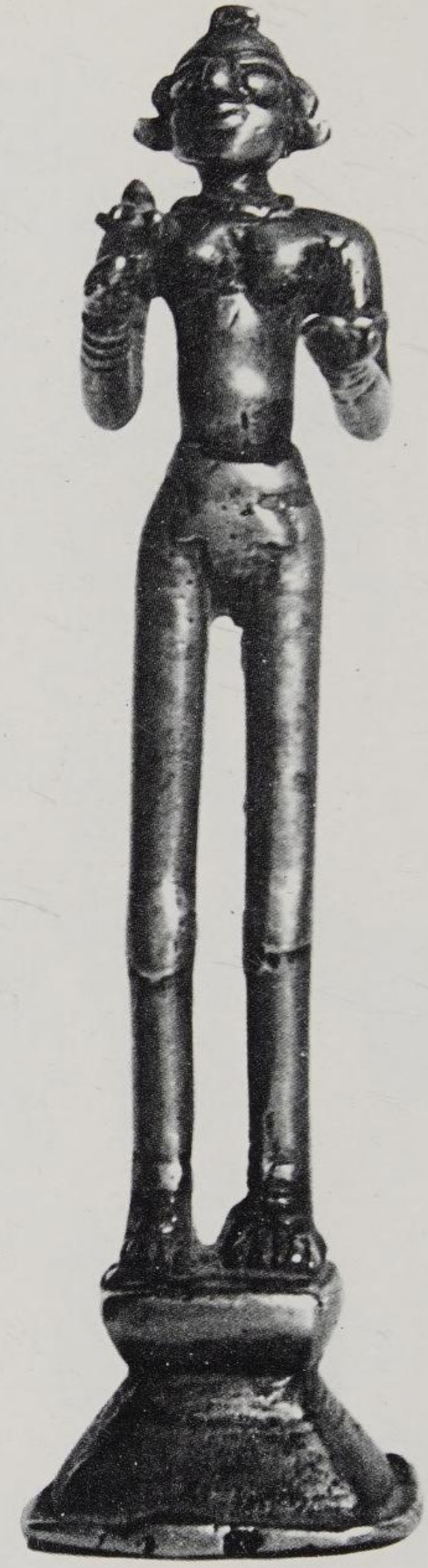
1. Ganesh, a metal plaque, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.

2. Ganesh seated on a high pedestal, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. 16th century.

3. Profile view of pl. 2.

4&5. Village hero, Rajasthan. 10th century.

6. A donor or devotee, Maharashtra. 18th century.



7. Parvati, Rajasthan. 17th century.

8. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion.
Rajasthan or Maharashtra. 17th century.

9. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion.
Himachal Pradesh. Late 18th century.

10. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion.
Himachal Pradesh. Late 18th century.

11. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion. Chiselled.
Rajasthan. 17th century.

12. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion.
Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.

13. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion.
Himachal Pradesh. 16th century.

14. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion. Himachal Pradesh. 19th century.

15. Simhavahini, Durga astride a lion. Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.

16. Shiva astride his bull. Maharashtra. 17th-18th century.

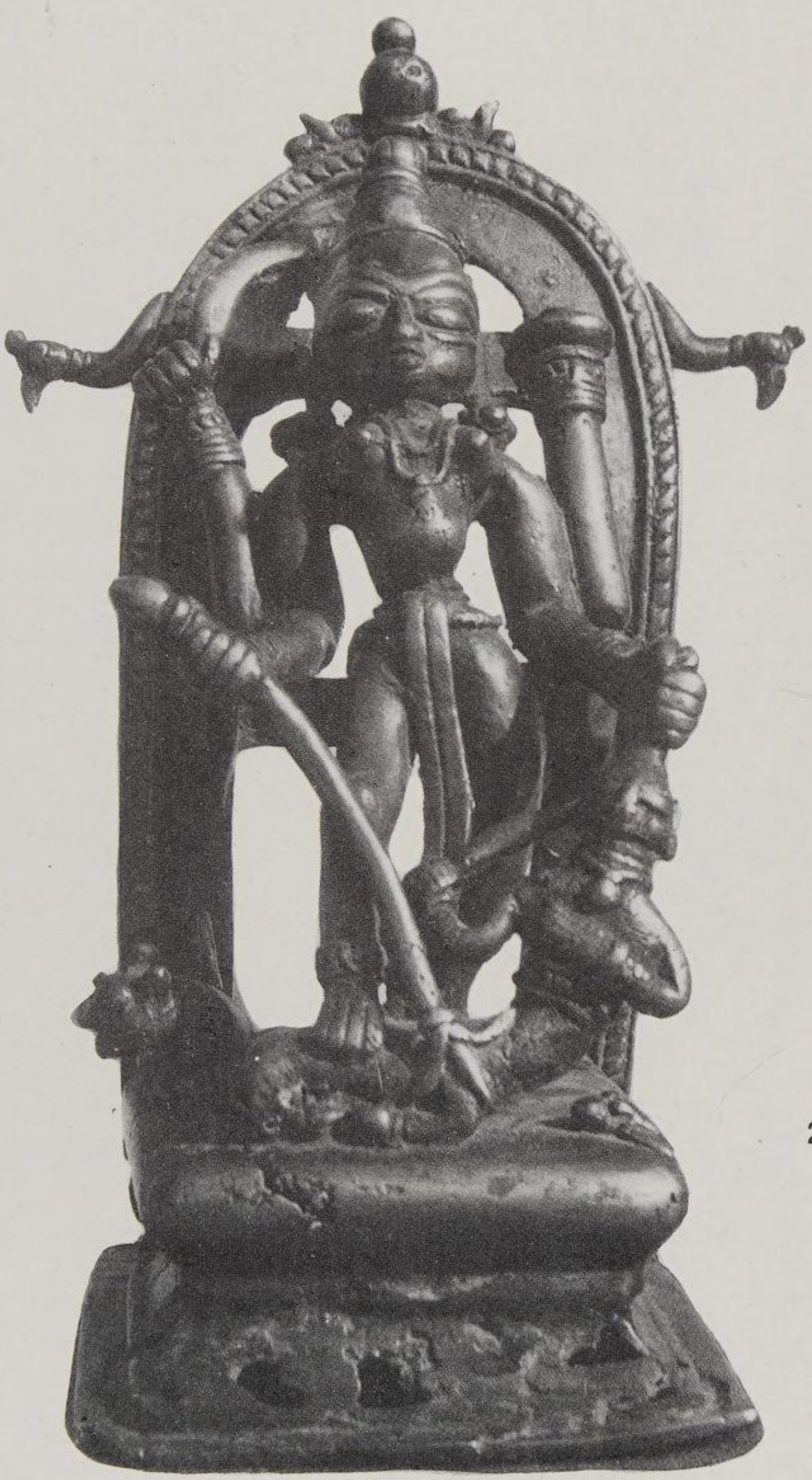
17. Equestrian figure. Maharashtra. 18th century.

18. Equestrian figure. Bastar, Madhya Pradesh. Late 18th century.

19. Equestrian figure. Maharashtra. 18th century.

20. Shiva Parvati riding on Nandi. Maharashtra. 17th century.

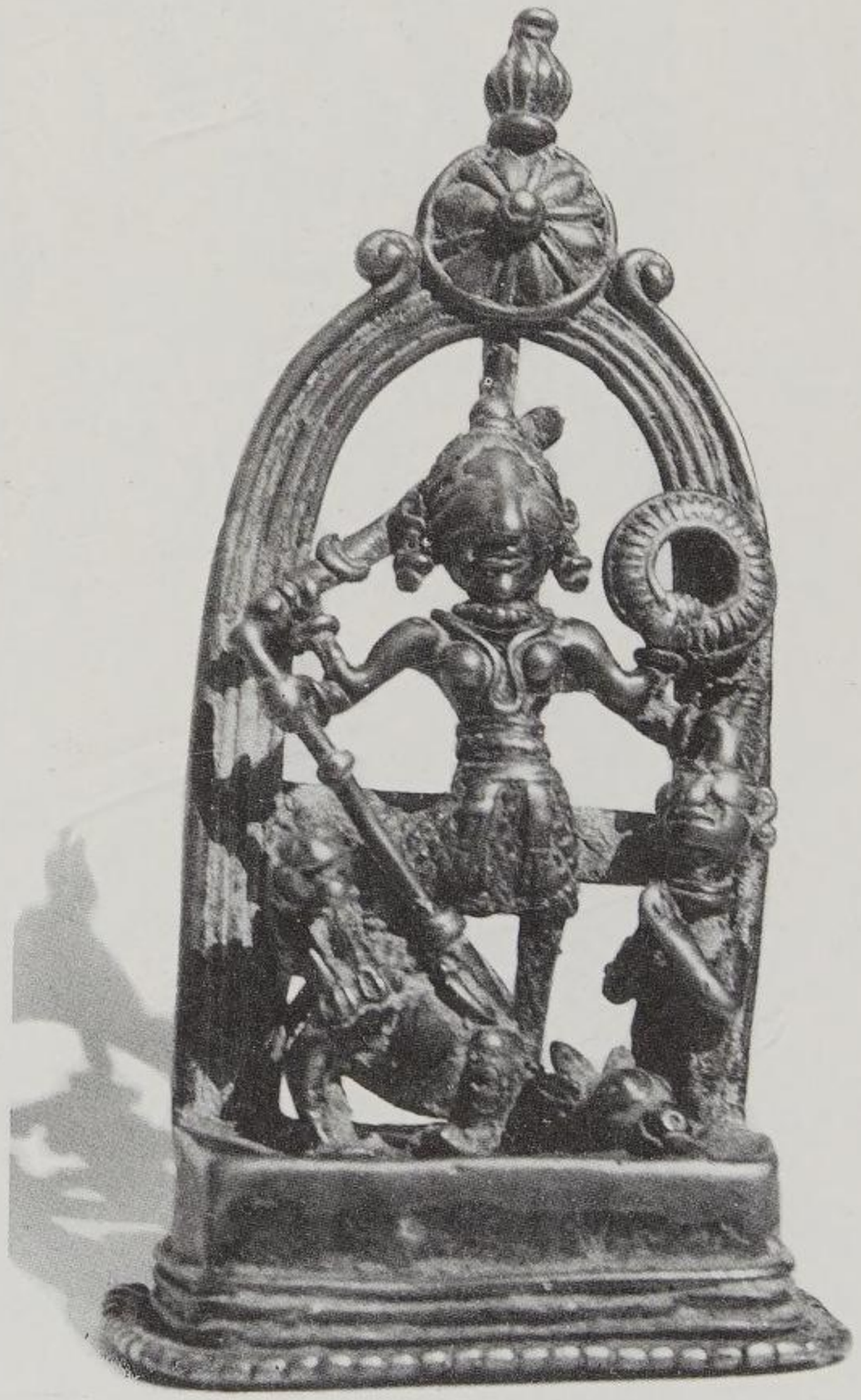
21. Gugga Chauhan in a dramatic posture. Rajasthan. 16th century.



22. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Gujarat. 18th century.

23. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.

24. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.



25. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.

26. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Himachal Pradesh. Late 17th century.

27. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Rajasthan. 19th century.

28. Durga and her lion, a plaque from Kangra. 19th century

29. Goddess Kali, Bastar, Madhya Pradesh. Contemporary.

30. Eight-armed Durga. Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.

31. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Himachal. 17th-18th century.

32. Eight-armed Durga. Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.

33. Durga, iron plaque. Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.

34. Mahakali, Kulu, Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.

35. Six-armed Mahakali. Himachal Pradesh. 14th century.

36. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.

37. Durga Mahishasuramardini. Shimla Hills Himachal Pradesh. 16th century.

38. Shiva head. Maharashtra. 17th century.

39. Bhairava head. Maharashtra or Karnataka. 18th century.

40. Shiva head. Maharashtra or Karnataka. 19th century.

41. Shiva head in copper sheet. Maharashtra or Karnataka. 19th century.

42. Shiva as Mukhalinga (phallus-cover). Maharashtra or Karnataka. 17th century.

43. Shiva Mukhalinga. Maharashtra or Karnataka. 17th century.

44. Shiva as Mukhalinga. Maharashtra or Karnataka. 17th century.

45. Shiva Mukhalinga, Maharashtra or Karnataka. 17th century.

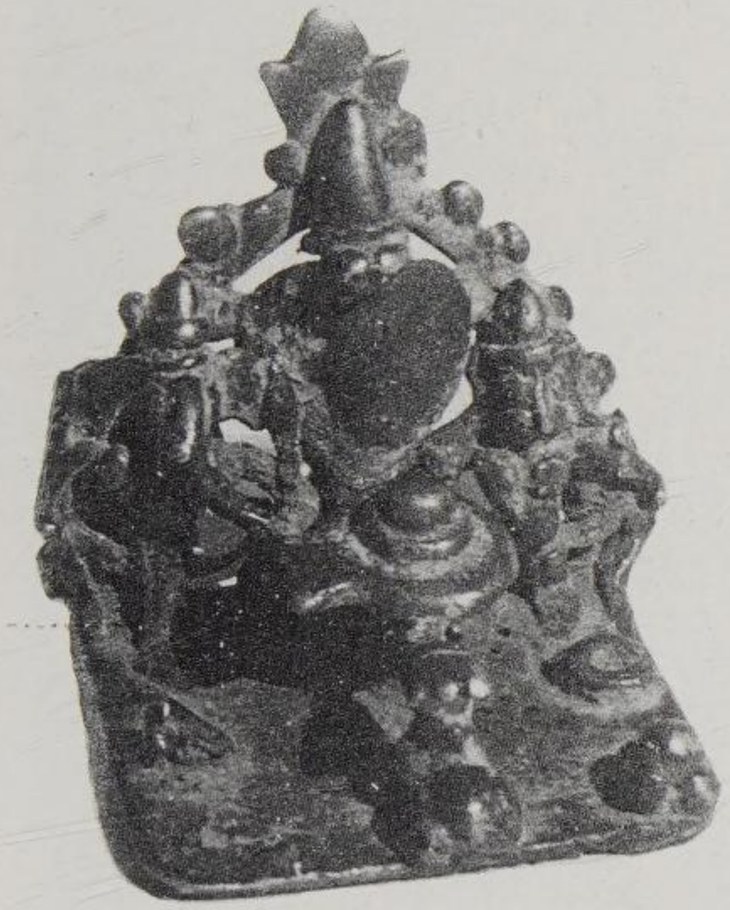
46. Shiva Parvati in a shrine. Maharashtra. 17th century.

47. Village deities (Gramdevata). Gujarat or Rajasthan. 16th century.

48. Village hero. Maharashtra. 15th century.

50. Shiva Parvati on an altar. Maharashtra. 17th century.

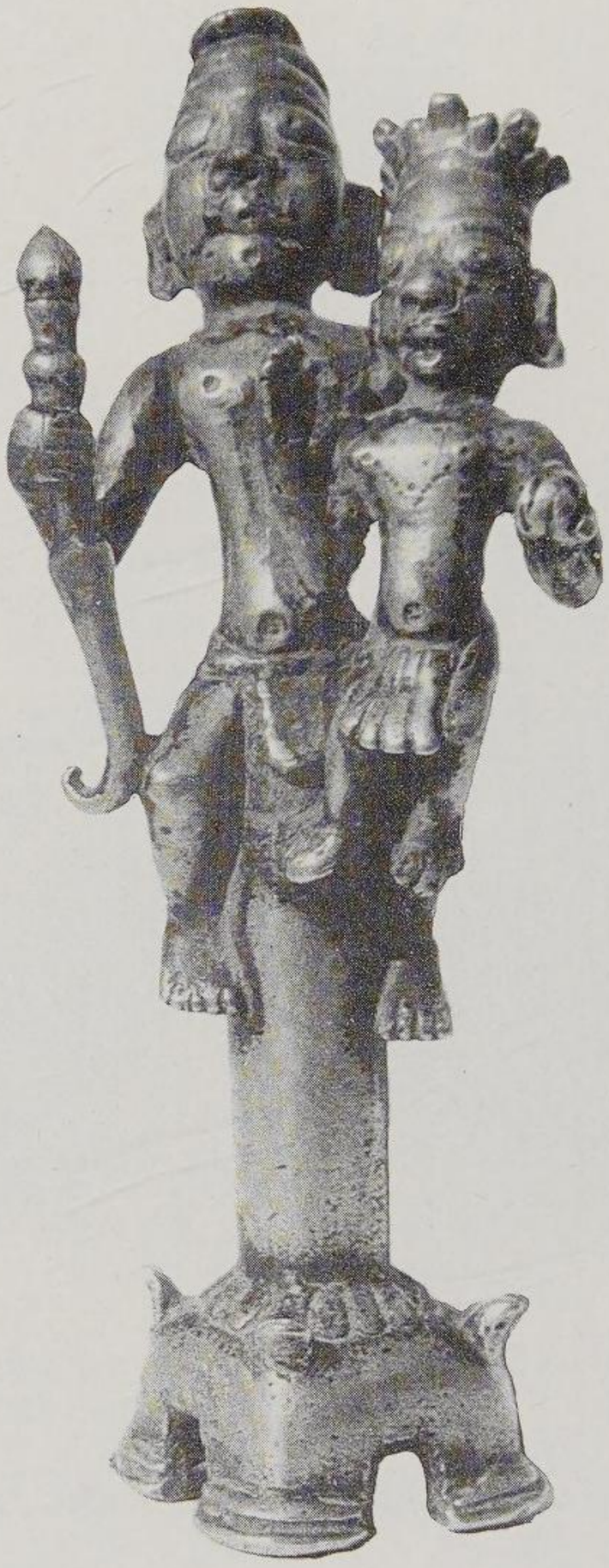
49. Miniature shrine. Maharashtra. 17th century.



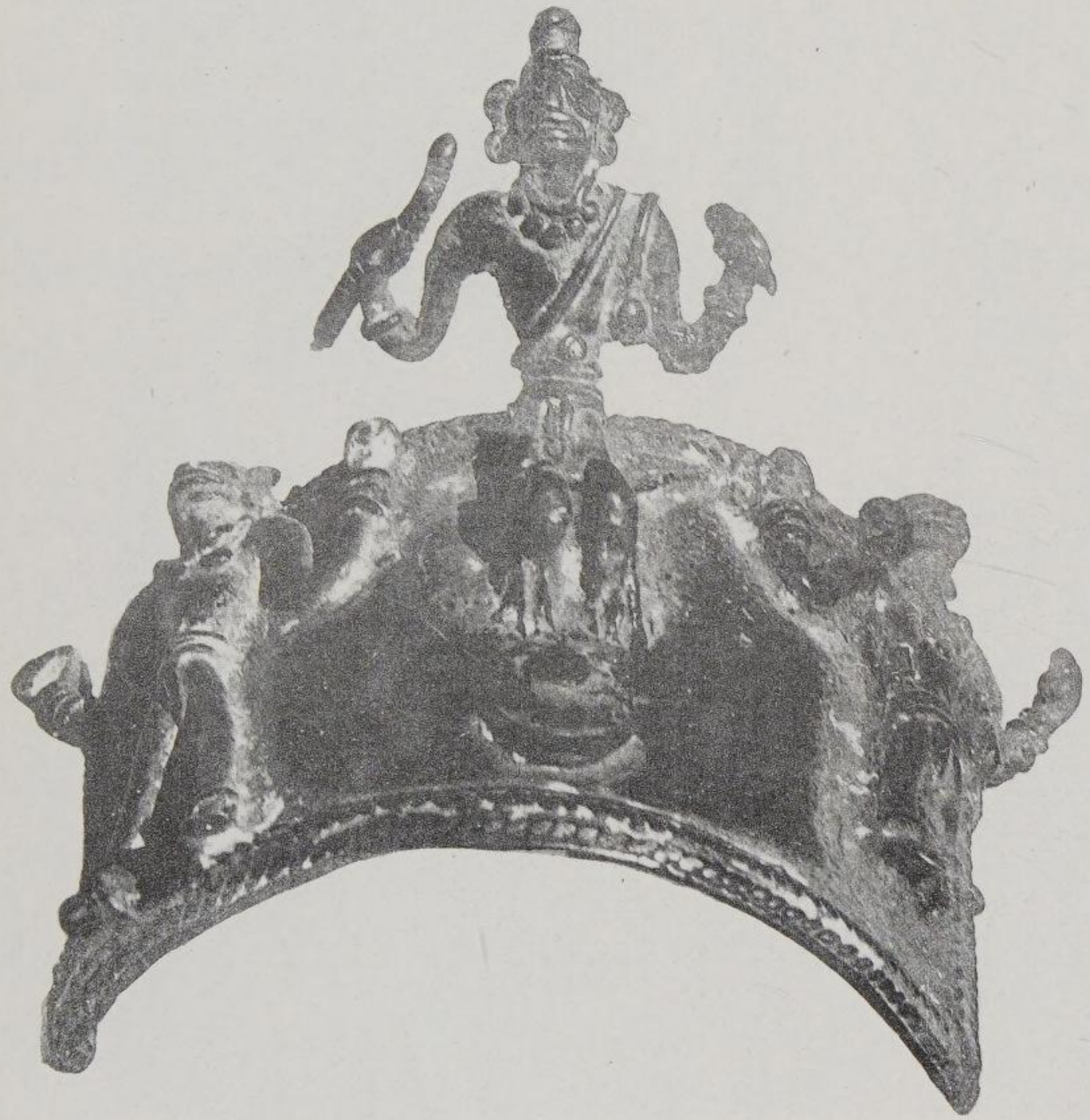
51. Miniature shrine. Maharashtra. 18th century.

52. Shiva Parvati on an altar. Maharashtra. 18th century.

53. Shiva and Parvati in conjugation. Himachal Pradesh. 17th-18th century.



54. Shiva Parvati perched atop a lingam.
Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.



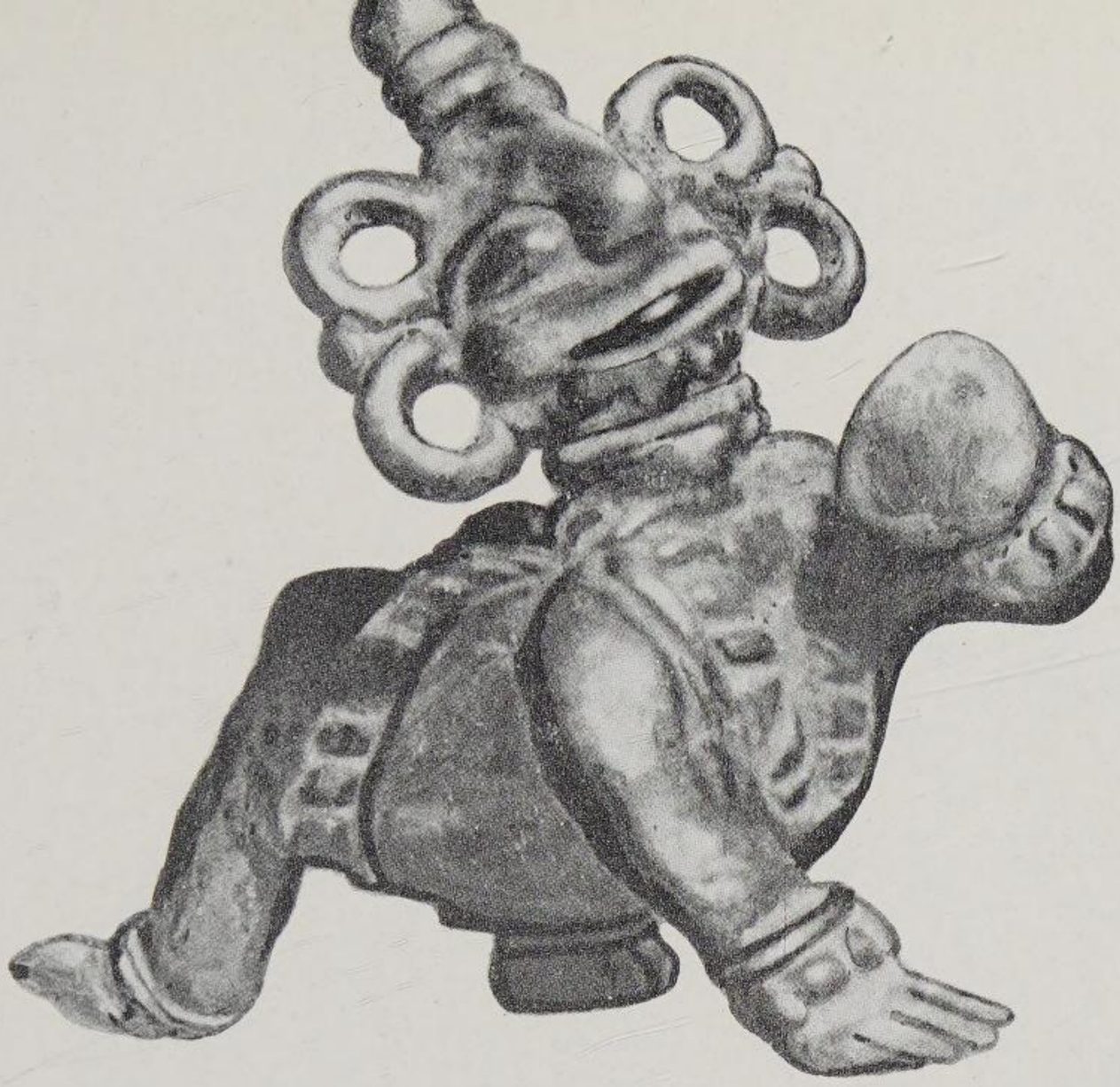
55. Rural deities. Maharashtra-Karnataka border. 17th-18th century.

56. Virbhadra. Maharashtra-Karnataka. 16th century.

57. Vishnu on the coils of Anantanaga. Himachal. 18th century.

58. Narasimha with Lakshmi. Maharashtra or Karnataka. 16th century.

59. Narasimha killing Hiranyakashipu. Chamba. 10th century.



60-61. Balakrishna. Rajasthan. 18th-19th century.

62. Hanuman carrying the hill. Himachal. 17th century.

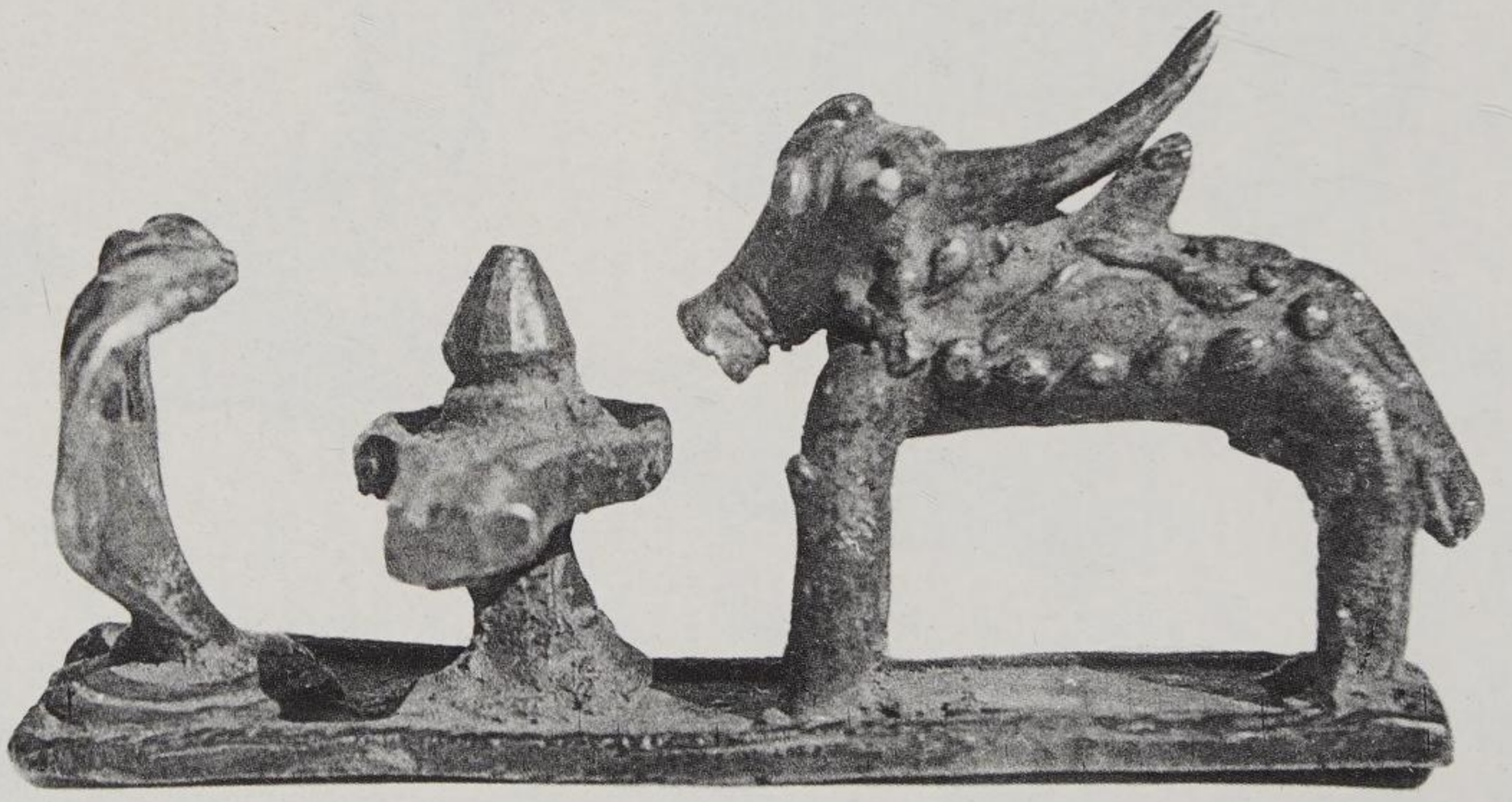
63. Hanuman plaque from Himachal. 17th century.

64. Hanuman eating fruits. South India. 18th-19th century.

65. Hanuman paying obeisance. Himachal. 18th century.

66. Donor couple. Western India? 12th century.

67. Village deities. Western India. 18th century.



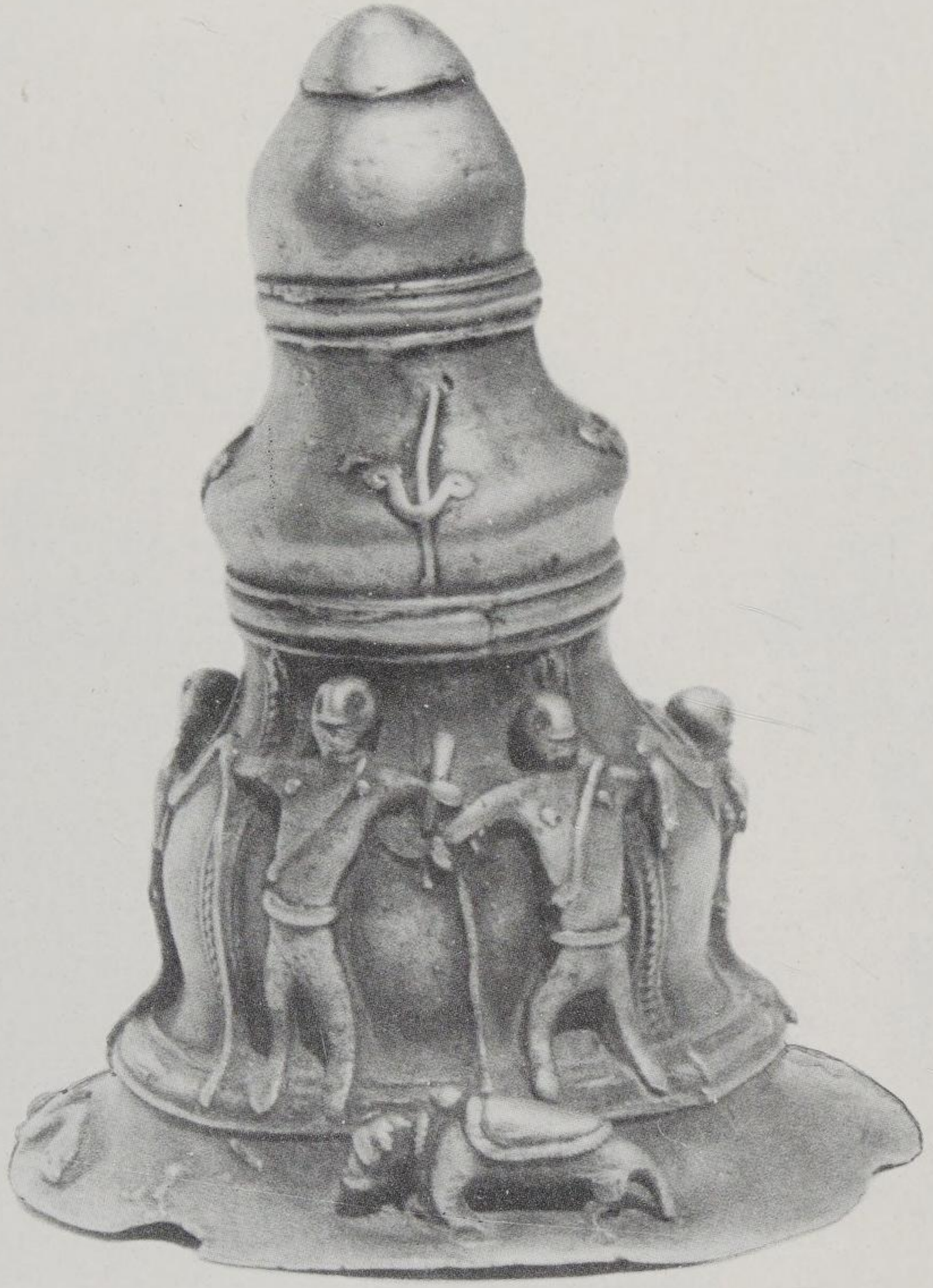
68. Nandi and Shesha flanking Lingam-yoni. Maharashtra. 19th century.

69. Panchamukha Shiva astride Nandi. Maharashtra. 17th-18th century.

70. Sadashiva, Karnataka. 17th-18th century.

71. Ten-headed Shiva, Nasik, Maharashtra late 18th century.

72-73. Five-headed Shiva. Maharashtra. late 18th century.



74-75. Shaivite phallic covers. Maharashtra. 16th and 17th century.

76. Four-armed Vishnu. Chamba, Himachal. 12th century.

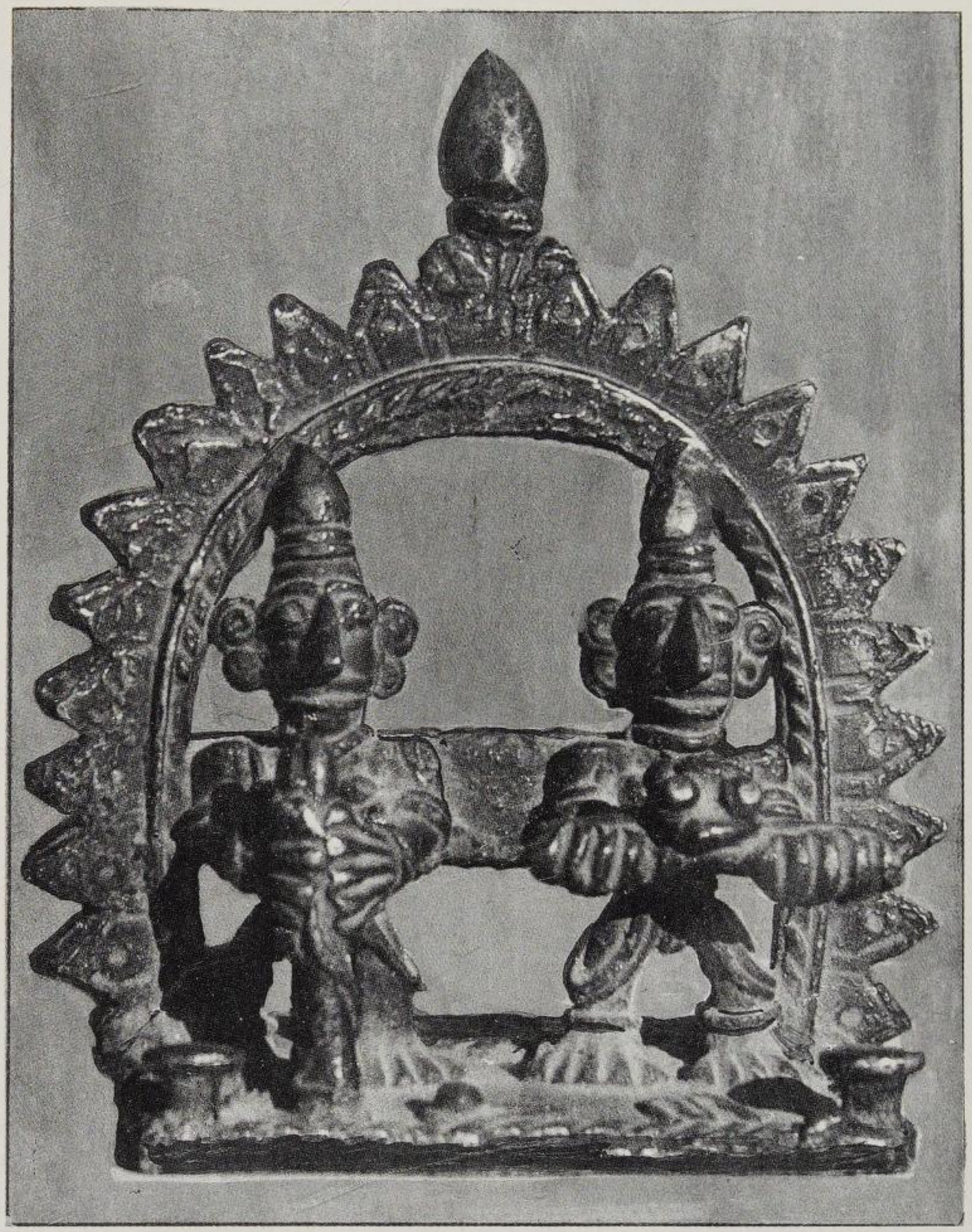
77. Profile view of pl. 76.

78. A Shaivite group, Nasik, Maharashtra. Early 19th century.

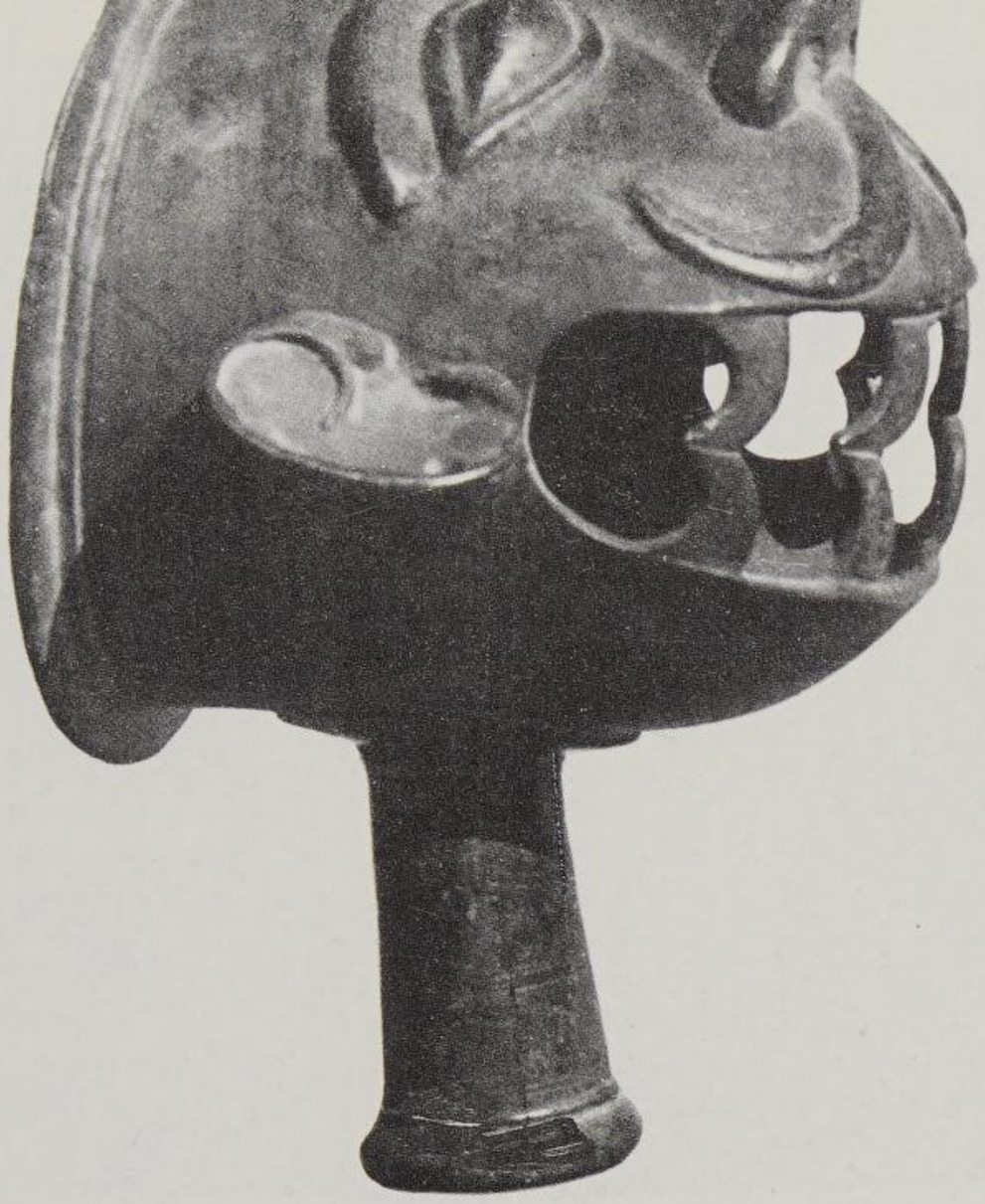
79. Flute playing Krishna. Rajast
19th century.

80. Flute-player and a seated fi
Maharashtra. late 18th centu

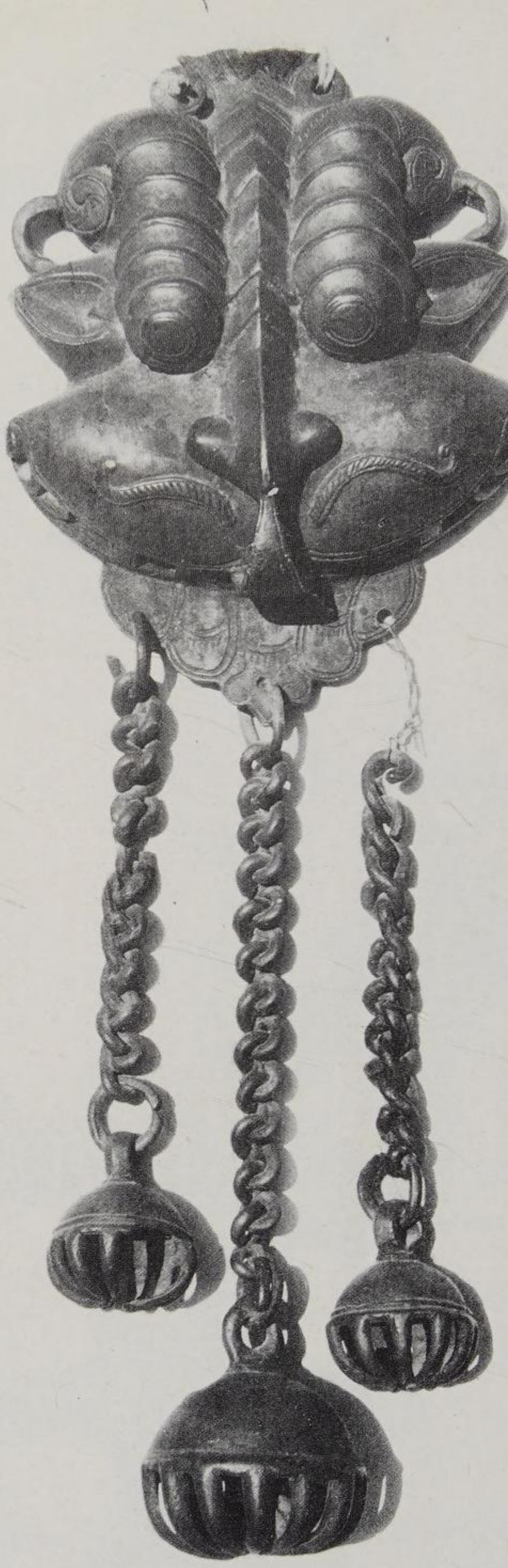
81-82. Village deities. Rajasthan or Maharashtra. 18th and 19th century.



83. Vasudev carrying baby Krishna. Rajasthan. 19th century.



84-85. Tiger head. Rajasthan or Maharashtra. 19th century.



86. Daksha mask. Karnataka. Early 19th centur

87. Devi Mask, Kulu, Himachal. 16th century.

88. Shiva mohra, Mandi. Himachal. contemporary.

89-90. Devi masks, Kulu, Himachal. 18th-19th cent

91-92. Devi mohras, Kulu, Himachal. 18th century.

93. Mukhalinga, Nasik, Maharashtra. 17th century.

94. Shaivite group, Maharashtra. 19th century.

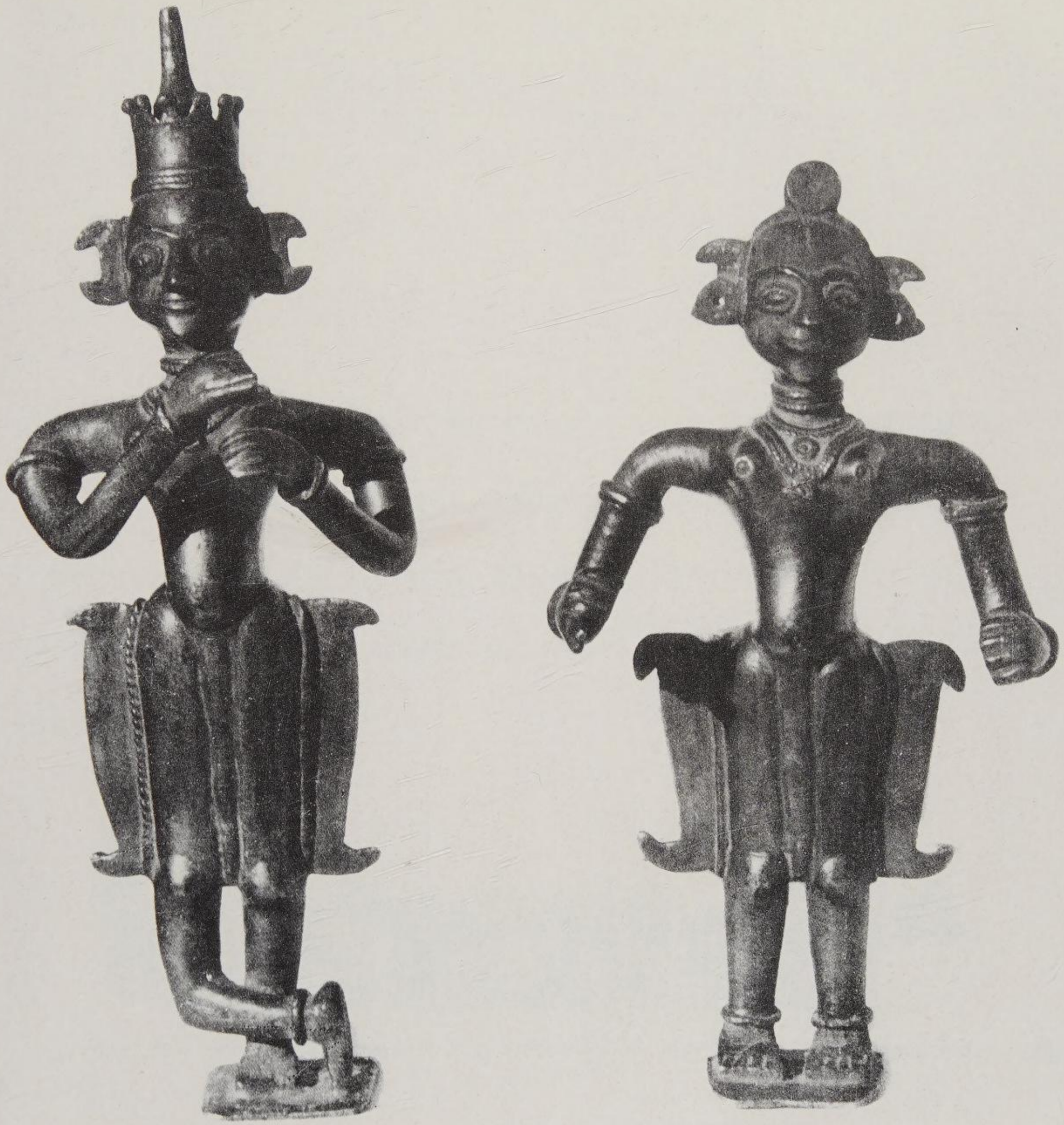
95. A female devotee and a horse-riding couple. Karnataka-Maharashtra. 19th century.

96-97. Seated rural deities or Gramadevata. Probably Karnataka. 18th and 19th century.

98. A rural deity in anjali mudra. Himachal. 17th century.

99. Virbhadra. South India. 15th century.

100-101. Garuda, Kangra. Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.



102. Radha and Krishna. Rajasthan-Gujarat. Late 18th century.

103. Rare specimen of cowherd Krishna leading the flock of cows. Rajasthan. late 19th century.

The folk bronzes are important not only as documents of the religious and folk culture of India, but also as documents of the history of art. ***The history of these folk-images is embedded in their dramatic expression and form.***

DESCRIPTION OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

Fig. I Sunga Lady, Terracotta, Mathura. 2nd century B.C.

Fig. II-III Female Head (left) from Kulli culture of southern Baluchistan, the Zhob valley sites, which produced a number of clay figurines in the third millennium B.C. This, of course, is a portion of a clay toy (not an independent head) and the other (right) from Harappa of the same period. Here we can simply see that the deep-rooted tradition was kept alive for many a thousand years in the Western India. The same prehistoric treatment of modelling in clay is still going on which we may see in the folk bronzes of western India.

Fig. IV Shiva and Parvati (a 19th century soft-stone figurine from the Kangra hills).

Its character, style and spirit are the same as those of terracotta figurines and Pahari bronzes.

Fig. V Buddha Avalokiteshvara (Seventh century A.D. Kashmiri bronze about the same size as reproduced).

This sophisticated bronze shows the simplicity and crystalline perfection of the essentially Indian conception, which was marvellously achieved through Gupta Art. The figure is well-balanced to create the rounded fullness of form and the warmth of flesh. This style of lyrical beauty based on the new school was completely free from any alien influence and had its roots deep in the indigenous soil. This perfection had been achieved during the reign of the famous king Lalitaditya Muktapida of Karkota dynasty.

Fig. VI Harirai, Metal statue, Chamba. 11th Century A.D.

Enshrined in the Harirai temple near the Chaugan gate in Chamba, this superbly cast metal statue of Vishnu Vaikuntha is clearly in Chamba-Kashmiri style. Two of his four hands are resting on the haloes of his accompanying figures Gada Devi and Chakra purusha his personified weapons. The torana-like prabhavali and a high pedestal are usual features of metal sculptures of the tenth and eleventh centuries from Himachal Pradesh.

Fig. VII Shiva and Parvati, metal sculpture (lifesize) Chamba. 10th-11th century A.D.

There existed in Chamba a school of sculpture that flourished from the seventh to eleventh centuries A.D. The highly consummate and accomplished sculptors absorbed and assimilated influences flowing from the northern Indian plains during the Gupta, post-Gupta and Gurjara-Pratihara periods as well as from Kashmir, the neighbouring kingdom. This group of Uma-Maheshvara accompanied by Nandi is one of the masterpieces created by the Chamba sculptors of the tenth-eleventh centuries A.D. in classical style. The sculpture is in worship in the Gauri-Shankar temple in Chamba temple complex.

Fig. VIII Shiva and Parvati. Chamba. 12th century A.D.

A good specimen of bronze dating back to 12th

century. This semi-folk bronze from Chamba is remarkable for its delicate and beautiful workmanship. The figures are more akin to classical bronzes but its halo is similar to folk bronzes. It has been wrought by lost wax process.

Fig. IX Jain Tirthankara, metal sculpture, South Rajasthan, 14th century A.D.
Such bronzes featuring the Tirthankara seated in dhyanamudra in Kayotsarga posture has eyes inlaid in silver. The image is conceived in terms of a miniature shrine. Such bronzes have come down to us in large numbers from Gujarat and Rajasthan, dating from the 14th and 16th centuries A.D. They are remarkable for the symmetrical disposition of the figures of attendant divinities, guardians, musicians and devotees or donors standing with folded hands. The Tirthankara is seated on a cushion on a lion throne canopied by an elaborate chhattra. The elaborate pedestal comprises two tiers. The navagrahas (nine planets) are seen on both sides of the pedestal, near the haloed heads of the male and female devotees. The makara snouts and the elaborate torana prabhavali are common features of such bronzes. Often all these bronzes are inscribed on the back, indicating the date of their casting.

Fig. X Jain Tirthankara in standing posture with the Sesha (serpent), Rajasthan or Gujarat, 15th century A.D.

Fig. XI Durga Mahishasuramardini, bronze figurine, Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.

This lively image features ten-armed Durga engaged in fight with the buffalo-demon Mahisha whose animal form and decapitated head are seen on the right whose form is completely over-powered by the mighty goddess. The entire treatment of the theme is conventional, and the style is closer to classical rather than folk bronzes.

Description of the Plates

1. Ganesh, a metal plaque, Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.
This four-armed image of Ganesh features him in a rather unusual posture--he is neither standing nor sitting. He is carrying his usual emblems in his four hands— a rosary, a hatchet, a goad and laddus which are not clearly visible, as his trunk is resting on his cupped hand. Sporting a typically pahari three pronged tiara, he wears a beaded necklace, armlets and the patterned loose ends of his dhoti are prominently displayed in front. The image cast in high relief recalls votive clay figurines and is thrown into relief by a shrine-like prabhavali and a pedestal composed of two rows of lotus petals.

2. Ganesh seated on a high pedestal, Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. Circa 16th century.
The figure of Ganesh, god of good luck and remover of obstacles, is here composed of simple shapes well integrated in an organic plastic design. Cast by solid method of the cire perdue process, it is rather unusual in its entire treatment. The high pedestal derives its form from the traditional moorha; the trunk instead of being turned to the right or left is projecting in front and the god is carrying attributes not conventionally assigned to him.

3. Side view of Plate 2.

4-5. Village hero, Rajasthan. 10th century.
The beak-like nose, broad mouth, large affixed eyes, spiral ears distinguish this image of a rural warrior or a clan ancestor, deified after his death in the battle-field. The sword and shield held in his hands are broken. His large head supported on a long ringed neck presents quite a contrast to the comparatively small, flattened body. His vestigial legs placed on a flat base suggest a sitting posture. His high umbrella-like headdress relates him to the equestrian figure reproduced in Plate 17. It is three inches in height.

6. A donor or devotee. Maharashtra, 18th century.
This bearded figure standing on a pedestal in anjali mudra harks back to the Indus valley tradition; the facial features are as expressive as those of the bearded priest from Mohenjo-daro. The large veil-like background lends prominence to the figure.

7. Goddess Parvati, Rajasthan. 17th century.
Unusually elongated cylinder-like legs support a much small torso. Evidently the inspiration has come from the clay images of Parvati used for processions taken out for the Gangaur festival in Rajasthan. The spiral ears are common to most folk bronze figurines from Rajasthan and other provinces.

8-15. Simhavahini, Durga riding a lion.
The numerous examples representing the same theme from Rajasthan or Maharashtra (Plate 8), Rajasthan (Plate 11) and Himachal

Pradesh (Plates 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15) display the diversity of techniques and treatment adopted by the rural metal-workers. Of these Plate 8 is the most unusual in every respect. The Great Goddess is standing on her vahana; her feet press against the body of the lion as though they were glued on to it. Dressed like a warrior, she seems to be marching towards the battlefield with a sword, the tip of which again rests on the mane of her animal. In her other hand, she is carrying a blood vessel. Her shield is protecting her chest, matching which are her large circular ear-studs which are commonly worn by the Bhils and tribals of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The criss-cross patterns on the lively body of the lion are set off by the wavy patterns on the garment covering the goddess's body.

The number of arms of the goddess vary from image to image from two to twelve. In each case, the lion's gaping mouth shows a tongue sticking out and the animal's posture suggests as if it were about to charge. In Plate 9, the goddess's tongue protruding from her mouth matches the blood-thirsty expression on her animal's face. Plate 11 is imbued with exceptional vigour and bold workmanship achieved by the chiselling technique in metal. The earthiness, the ripeness with which each limb of the goddess is imbued relates the image to the soil from which it has sprung. The smooth--limbed simplified form of the goddess and her vahana in Plate 14 has a special charm. The Himachal bronze figurines of the goddess riding on her vahana are equally dynamic, boldly conceived and moving.

It is notable that the physiognomical expressions of the Great Goddess and the lion in each image are identical.

16. Shiva astride his bull vahana. 17th-18th century. Maharashtra.

The figure of the bearded Shiva is placed at the back of his vahana Nandi. His matted hair are tied tightly in a neat bun matching his circular earrings. The archaic physiognomical features combined with his tubular arms are usual traits of folk images. His hands wielding kamandalu and staff emphasise his ascetic aspect. The entire figure of Nandi is overlaid with lines and circles to accentuate the trappings, the knees, the eyes and the snout. This treatment enhances the ornamental effect and is obtained by applying rolled wax strings to the surface before casting. The figurine is more in the style of clay votive figurines.

17-19. Equestrian figurines, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. 18th century.

The rural warriors or heroes who laid down their lives for their homeland or for the honour of their clans are often commemorated as riding on a horse. They are also mentioned as tribal heroes or spirit riders. As such, they were worshipped or used as votive offerings. The stylistic diversity seen in these images that were fashioned in the countryside all over India is mind-boggling. The slender grace and sprightliness of the horse in Plate. 17 contrasts sharply with the horses reproduced in Plates 18 and 19. Plate 18 is provided with a flat base. For the most part, the figurine is streaked with incised lines. The rider's fan-like headdress is

unusual. Sometimes emphasis is on the elongated adornment of the head. In each figurine, the rider holds a sword and the bridle of the horse to emphasise their warrior traits. This is further accentuated by the erect proudful posture of the rider. Pellet-like eyes stand out prominently from their archaic faces. The treatment of the horse in each image is varied—some are lean and slender, others have full massive smooth bodies, arched or long neck, curved tail, stylised mane, narrow head. The legs may be tensely diagonal in the manner of clay toys. On the whole they are markedly elegant.

20. Shiva-Parvati riding on Nandi, Maharashtra, 17th century.
This is a very unusual depiction of Shiva and Parvati riding on Nandi. Parvati seated behind her husband has both her arms around him, displaying tender human emotions. The posture of their heads conveys the impression that they are engaged in conversation. Curiously, the trident is held in front. The trappings of Nandi are produced by applying rolled wax strings to the surface before casting.

21. Gugga Chauhan in a dramatic posture, Rajasthan. 16th century.
A rare masterpiece amongst specimens of equestrian figurines. The massive inflated body of the horse is far more boldly conceived than the horses chiselled by the Italian sculptor Marino Marini. The legs of the rider, the famed Rajput warrior Gugga Chauhan, are not shown. It seems that his body is issuing out of that of the horse or he has merged his identity with that of his horse. It is strange that four centuries before Marino Marini, our rural metal casters could execute such bold figurines.

22-27. Durga Mahishasuramardini.
The victory of Durga over the buffalo-demon Mahisha has been a popular theme with artists all over India. This is one of the most widely worshipped aspect of the Great Goddess. Each of these images come from different provinces--plate 22 from Gujarat, plates 23 to 26 from Himachal Pradesh, plate 27 from Rajasthan, each a rural or semi-folk interpretation of the popular theme. Interestingly, all of them follow the same iconographic concept. A sequence of events has been illustrated. Durga is seen standing triumphantly on the body of the vanquished demon. Mahisha is seen emerging out of the buffalo's body lying prostrate at the goddess's feet; his tuft of hair is caught in her hand and she kills him with her trident. This iconographic concept gained popularity in the post-Gupta period and images continued to be carved in this manner in all subsequent centuries. All our images reproduced here are closely related to the classical style sculptures of Durga Mahishamardini. Barring two examples, all the images feature the goddess as having four arms. In the Himachal images, the flourishing sword held in the upper right hand is always lifted up behind the head of the goddess so as to suggest that she is all set to cut off the demon's head. The alidha posture is retained in plates 23, 24, 25, and 27. In plate 24, the fore arms of the goddess seem to grow out of the front upper arms like off-

shoots. The pedestals and the prabhavalis of each image are in classical style.

28. Goddess Durga and her lion vahana, a plaque from Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. 19th century.
The bell-shaped full length skirt of the goddess Durga standing in anjali mudra strikes one immediately. Her vahana stands on the same pedestal by her side. Each figure is provided by a shrine-like prabhavali.

29. Goddess Kali, Bastar (Madhya Pradesh) Contemporary.
Four-armed goddess Kali stands on a high cylindrical pedestal. Her protruding tongue indicates her blood-thirsty nature, as the goddess Parvati had assumed this form to extinguish the demons from the face of the earth. Hence the sword held high in one of her hands and the blood vessel in the other. The ornaments are overlaid on the chest and the prabhavali surrounds not her entire figure but only her head. The saw-tooth pattern on the prabhavali is symbolic of the flames.

30. Eight-armed Durga in standing posture, Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.

The six arms of the goddess are affixed to the tubular front arms in such a manner so as to look like stumps of offshoots issuing out of the tree trunks. The attributes held in the hands are missing. The incised lines indicate details of the ornaments.

31. Durga Mahishasuramardini, Himachal Pradesh. 17th-18th century.
This image is incomplete. It seems that its pedestal on which stood Mahisha, the buffalo demon, is missing; so also the lion, Durga's vahana, which she must be riding in the original image. This is obvious from the position of the legs. She is carrying, in her four arms, a sword, a trident, a blood vessel and a noose. The two oblique lines across the chest are not indicative of a quiver which would be redundant here, as the goddess is not shown carrying a bow. While the metalsmith has strictly adhered to the iconographic texts in the delineation of this image, he has taken liberties here, as happens very commonly in folk bronzes.

32. Eight-armed Durga, Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.
The goddess is dressed like a warrior. Her lion vahana is missing. Her breasts are nubbins of metal. Details of her garments are incised skilfully.

33. Durga, iron plaque, Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.
This plaque at once recalls the Mother Goddess figurines of the Mauryan period. Cast in the style of clay figurines, it has a rather unusual crown. The volumetric form seems to stand out clearly against the flat background.

34. Mahakali, Kulu, Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.
The blood thirsty nature of the goddess Mahakali— the ferocious form assumed by the warrior goddess Durga whose complexion

turned black due to intense anger roused by the ever increasing number of demons issuing out of the blood drops of Raktabija— is emphasised by her physiognomical traits and her protruding tongue. The mundamala, garland of skulls, is seen around her neck, and she is carrying a demon's severed head in one of her four arms. She is seated in padmasana.

35. Six-armed Mahakali standing on a pedestal, Himachal Pradesh. 14th century.
This powerful naked image of Mahakali features her standing on an unusual pedestal cast in the shape of an ashtadal padma. The eight-petal lotus or the octagonal-shaped yantra is always associated with her. The articulated pelvic muscles, the navel which looks like a crescent over a circle, the pendant that looks like the third eye are some of the common features.

36. Durga Mahishasuramardini, Himachal Pradesh, 17th century.
A very pleasing symmetrically arranged prabhavali and pedestal relate this image to the classical style life size images enshrined in the Himachal temples. The figures of Durga and Mahisha, in sharp contrast, are folkish in form although iconographically again, it is related to the classical style sculptures, except for the alidha posture. The prabavali is inspired by the curvilinear spire of the Nagara style temples.

37. Durga Mahishasuramardini, Himachal Pradesh. 16th century.
Iconographically correct, this is one of the few folk images featuring Durga dressed in a full-length patterned skirt. The third eye vertically inscribed on the goddess's forehead is a common feature. The curvilinear prabhavali surrounds the figures of the goddess as well as Mahisha.

38. Shiva head, Maharashtra, 17th century.
Large eyes, stylised beard, prominent twirled moustaches, pointed tusk-like teeth protruding from the corners of the open mouth contribute to the terrific aspect of Shiva. Such images are probably related to the theatrical masks. The three horizontal lines and a circle, the snakehood canopying the Shiva lingam above the god's head emphasise Shaivite associations. More or less the same features mark all the Shiva heads cast in Maharashtra. Such images are generally lifesize.

39. Bhairava or Aghora, fierce aspect of Shiva. Maharashtra or Karnataka. 18th century. Brass worked in repoussee.
Almost invariably, the images of the Shaivite deities are marked by the third eye vertically placed in the middle of the forehead. The hair, otherwise indicated by vertical oblique lines, are shown as lotus petals standing like bristles from one end to another above the ears.

40. Shiva Bhairava, Maharashtra or Karnataka. Brass sheet. 19th century.
But for the large slit forming the mouth, this mask-like head of Shiva Bhairava has affinities with the Ravana mask used in the Punjab plains as a mould for making his effigies on the occasion of Dussehra.

41. Copper image of Shiva-Bhairava, Maharashtra or Karnataka. 19th century. Repousse'd sheet.
Compared to the images seen above, this enormously large head has a gentler expression and is shown wearing a turban. The same feature distinguishes the brass Bhairava head reproduced in plate 42. All the images reproduced here as well as in plates 43, 44 and 45 were used as Lingam covers are hollow inside.

42-45. Brass images of Shiva used as Lingam covers, Maharashtra or Karnataka. 17th century.
All these icons appear to have been inspired by the stone Mukhalingas widely worshipped all over India. The rural metalsmiths display greater freedom in the execution of these lingam covers.

46. Shiva and Parvati or Bhairava and Maheshvari seated in a shrine, Maharashtra. 17th century.
Such icons were commonly fashioned for worship in Maharashtrian rural homes. Identically fashioned, sporting identical crowns and ornaments, these deities sit along one edge of the square altar raised as a platform surrounding a lingam-yoni and extending to a waterspout. The deities loom large over the lingam-yoni, the figures of Nandi, cobra and other deities. A broad-rimmed pipe shaped stand is cast with and supports the sanctuary. Their conical crowns enable us to ascertain that their provenance could be southern Maharashtra, very close to Karnataka-Maharashtra border.

47. Village deities (Gramdevata), Gujarat or Rajasthan. 16th century.
A very unusual prabhavali with two horizontal crossbars surrounds the female and male deities standing on a raised pedestal. Details of their crowns, ornaments are carefully worked. They have greater affinities with tribal deities or probably they were fashioned and worshipped by the inhabitants of the tribal belt of Rajasthan or Gujarat.

48. Village hero, Maharashtra. 15th century.
This image has striking affinities with the clay images. The elongated head and the lower portion are in the round connected by flat chest, the horizontal shoulders extending to tubular arms. He is carrying indistinct objects, perhaps a sword that is broken and a shield, objects befitting a warrior. His legs merge with the four legged stool.

49 & 51. Miniature shrines, Maharashtra. 17th-18th century.
In the centre of the square shrine in each of these two illustrations is the lingam-yoni, the symbols of worship. Surrounding it are the Shaivite symbols : Ganesh, Nandi, the bull vahana of Shiva, a cobra, and other deities. Generally Annapurna, goddess of plenty, holding a ladle, Durga Mahishasuramardini etc. are also featured along with the sun and the moon, a pair of ritual sandals, and offerings. In plate 51, the sanctuary is slightly different. Here aligned along the edge of the square sanctuary are Ganesha and Nandishwar flanking the cobra in the centre. The prabhavali is an unusual feature here.

50 & 52. Shiva and Parvati seated on a raised altar, Maharashtra. 17th-18th century.

A fairly large number of bronze figurines of this type have come down to us from Maharashtra—Madhya Pradesh—Andhra borders. The figures of Shiva and Parvati are reduced to the primary shapes and connected by spirals. An altar, square in one case and circular-ovaloid in the other, is raised as a platform around the lingam-yoni. As in a temple, a waterspout is seen on the right. The figures of Shiva and Parvati seen along one side of the altar are identical. Their physiognomical features are grotesque and weird. A trident separates the figures. Both the figures loom large over all the figures massed together in this sanctuary.

53. Shiva and his spouse in conjugation, Himachal Pradesh. 17th-18th century.

This is one of the most powerfully executed bronzes that have come down to us from Himachal Pradesh. This image is based upon the theme oft painted by pahari artists and derived from the Devi legends. When the warrior goddess Durga was engaged in killing the demons Mahisha, Chanda, Munda, etc., she got tremendously infuriated when she encountered demons like Raktabija who went on multiplying when blooddrops fell from his body. Anger transformed her radiant complexion into black, that is how she acquired the name Mahakali. Her fury persisted even after killing Raktabija. So blinded was she by her rage and anger, that she went on killing indiscriminately whosoever was around. This caused deep concern amongst the Devas who fled to Heaven in terror and entreatied Indra, Brahma and Vishnu to prevail upon Shiva to appease his spouse. According to the linga purana, the combined efforts of Shiva and Parvati resulted in the horrible-looking goddess Kali who went on to defeat the oppressive demon Daruka. Bhava (Shiva) assumed the form of a boy due to his power of Maya and stationed himself in the cremation ground full of corpses and ghosts. Ishvara then cried in order to quaff the fire of her anger. On seeing the boy who was actually Ishana, the goddess was deluded by his Maya. She took him, kissed him on his head and suckled him at her breasts. Along with her breast-milk the boy quaffed up her wrath also and he became the protector of the holy centres. Her excessive anger was appeased by Shiva only after their happy union, the theme of this bronze which is unique in every sense.

This difficult theme has not been attempted by any stonecarver, as far as I know, and very rarely has been cast by metalworkers. Here Shiva lies prostrate on the ground in shavasana, both his arms lifted up and four-armed naked Kali stands on his body in an attitude of benediction.

54. Shiva and Parvati perched atop the lingam, Himachal Pradesh. 15th century.

The cylindrical form of the lingam is carried up into the bodies of Shiva and Parvati on top. Highly imaginative mukhalingas in metal have come down to us from Kashmir and Nepal. But the rural metalsmith of our image has gone a step further in placing the deities on top of the lingam, instead of juxtaposing them. The columnar lingam is supported by a square base. Shiva's legs press the lingam on both the sides while supporting Parvati on the left thigh.

55. Rural deities, Maharashtra-Karnataka border. 17th-18th century.

The central figure is seated like a king on a simhasana, flanked by figures standing with outstretched arms in the like manner. It has not been possible to identify these figures. The central figure has the majesty, grace and charm exuded by figures carved by highly accomplished sculptors.

56. Virabhadra, Maharashtra-Karnataka. 16th century.

This folk image of Virabhadra is powerfully cast and has all the appurtenances of classical style bronzes--the elliptical prabhavali, a controlled intensity of expression, clarity of modelling and strong sculptural rhythm.

57. Vishnu standing on the coils of Anantanaga, Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.

This deeply moving image of four-armed Vishnu features him standing on the coils of the serpent Ananta whose raised hoods are seen in front. The folds of his dhoti and the ornaments covering his entire chest are delieated with great skill.

58. Narasimha and his consort, an unusual specimen from Maharashtra or Karnataka. 16th century.

This is a folk version of the classical theme oft attempted by the Deccan metal sculptors. Canopied by the five-headed hood of the serpent Ananta, the god sits in lalitasana supporting Lakshmi on his left thigh on a high circular base. This pedestal is formed by large elongated lotus petals spreading out at bottom.

59. Narasimha killing Hiranyakashipu, Chamba. Tenth century.

According to the legend narrated in the Vishnu Purana, Vishnu assumed the form of a man-lion and emerged out of a pillar to kill the demon Hiranyakashipu, Prahlad's father, who doubted his omnipresence and omnipotence. His nails are dug in the fiend's body to disembowel his entrails. The striations mark the split pillar, the dhotis worn by both the figures, their hair and Narasimha's whiskers. A slightly raised circular base supports the figure of the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu. The modelling of the figures is suggestive of the techniques employed by a woodcarver rather than a metalcaster.

60-61. Baby Krishna or Balagopal, Rajasthan. 18-19th century.

Baby Krishna whose fondness for butter has been sung by Surdas and numerous Hindi poets of the 16th and 17th centuries fascinated the artists of Rajasthan much more. Krishna holds aloft a butter-ball in one hand while he crawls on all threes. The joyous expression on his face has been captured admirably. His hair tied in bun looks more like a ribbed amalaka in plate 61.

62. Hanuman in the posture of carrying the hill. Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.

The diverse exploits of Hanuman narrated in the Ramayana provided a rich storehouse of themes of the rural sculptors, but the theme of Hanuman returning with the hill remained their favourite. Here the god standing on a flat base is portrayed carrying the hill and the mace. The hill, highly stylised and looking like a ribbed object, hardly resembles a hill. The movement

of his legs is suggestive of the hurried strides taken by him in order to reach the spot where Lakshmana lay unconscious before the sunset. The modelling of his figure is full of vitality and has a great sense of movement and plastic form. The body is cast with considerable skill, emphasising the fullness and roundness of the flesh.

63. Hanuman, a metal plaque from Himachal Pradesh, 17th century.

On a betel leaf shaped plaque is depicted the figure of Hanuman carrying a standard and a gada. As in Rajasthani paintings, his legs are more massive and depicted in the conventional pose. Cast solid, the figure of the god conveys the impression of an image in the round. Impressive sculptural treatment haunts one.

64. Hanuman eating fruits, probably South India, 18th-19th century.

Seated on his coiled tail, Hanuman is eating fruits held in both his hands. The slim elongated figure, the posture of a common man eating are suggestive of the craftsman's imaginativeness. The cheeks are undercut for naturalistic effect. The god is sitting on a flat base.

65. Hanuman in the attitude of obeisance, Himachal Pradesh, 18th century.

Hanuman's physiognomical features are very unusual, more like those of Narasimha. Devotion is stamped on his face, as he joins his hand in anjali mudra and lifts his face up to pay obeisance to Sri Rama.

66. Donor couple, Western India. 12th century.

Reminiscent of the donor couples carved in stone on the rock-cut cave temples, this seated couple is extremely impressive. The female figure is carrying a tray of offerings. The aocomplished metalcaster's skill is evident in each and every detail of drapery, ornaments and coiffure. This image seems to date from a fairly ancient period.

67. Village deities, Western India. 18th century.

The conical headdress of the figure on the left contrasts sharply with the circular head of the figure on the right. Both are featured as sitting like babes. Perhaps such rural deities were propitiated for better crops.

68. Nandi and Shesha flanking lingam-yoni. Maharashtra, 19th century.

On a flat rectangular base stand the Shaivite symbol, lingam-yoni, to which homage is being paid by Nandi and the cobra shown with an erect hood. The arch of the long horns recapitulates the curve of the Nandi's face ending, curiously, in a snout. The pellet-like dots decorate his entire body and his solid clay-like legs are marked by knobby knees. This image combines the qualities of still-life with sculpture.

69. Panchamukha (Five-headed) Shiva astride Nandi, Maharashtra. 17th-18th century.

The icons of panchamukha Shiva have largely come from Maharashtra, some from South India. This image has remote affinities with the three-headed Shiva (Pl. 98 in Stella Kramrisch's Manifestations of Shiva). The faces stare from prominent eyes shaded by thick brows. Their hypnotising stare is repeated in the middle of the forehead as also on the upper arms. So also the circular devices on the chest.

There is no suggestion of neck; the five faces are aligned along the upper arms, shoulders and the centre of the shoulders. Curiously, the five-headed god has only two arms. sword and shield being held in his hands. Ornaments, girdle and the folds of his dhoti enhance the structure of the figure. The figure is symmetrically arranged against the elliptical prabhavali. The figure of Nandi is highly simplified. The emblems usually associated with Shiva, the snakes etc. are seen on the flat pedestal.

70. Sadashiva, Karnataka, 17-18th century.

The five heads surmounted by tall crowns of the panchanana Shiva is known as Sadashiva in the iconographic texts. His massive forearms and legs present a sharp contrast to slimmer faces and tubular side arms. Semi circular arch of the prabhavali enclose the five heads, to which correspond the five heart-shaped motifs on the high pedestal. Cast in white metal, this image has a queer indescribable charm. It has all the appurtenances of classical style bronzes.

71-73. Ten and five headed Shiva, Maharashtra. Late 18th century.

In sharp contrast to the image of Sadashiva are these highly abstracted images in pure folk style. The pinched faces, pellet— eyes, spiral ears and crowned heads are prominently visible. So are dhoti-clad legs and the staff held in the hand. The rest is sketchily presented. Plate 71 is made of lead.

74 & 75. Shiva lingams or phallus covers, Maharashtra. 16th & 17th century.

Effigy-like grotesque figures holding hands encircle the body of these lingam covers. They have striking affinities with the Buddhist stupas. Perhaps the inspiration came from the latter.

76 & 77. Four-armed Vishnu (seen in profile in Pl. 77), Himachal Pradesh 12th century.

Large lotus petals form the circular pedestal along with a square base for the four-armed Vishnu in this image. The god is shaded on top by Ananta. This is a specimen of solid casting, fashioned in a crude manner.

78. A Shaivite group, Nasik, Maharashtra. Early 19th century.

A rare image— the base is shaped like a petalled lotus, on which are placed a lingam-yoni, the symbols of worship, a cobra, a male figure with a staff and a ram.

79 & 80. Venu Gopal (flute playing) Krishna.

Two specimens of Venu Gopal, flute-playing Krishna, one completely different in treatment from the other. The sitting posture is conventional. Large circular beads (Pl. 79) decorating the hairline are evidently curls. The cylindrical pedestal is cast hollow. The body of the Divine cowherd is cast solid. The flute-player in Pl. 80 displays greater elegance. The second figure probably features an ascetic engrossed in the hard discipline of Yoga, his circular head held upright over the erect body. His physiognomical features have striking affinities with the Mohenjodaro bust. The images marked by great spontaneity seem to have been thoroughly kneaded like clay images.

81-82. Village deities, Rajasthan or Maharashtra. 18th and 19th century.

Standing on a raised rectangular pedestal

against a shrine-like prabhavali are a male and a female deities. The god has four arms. On the other hand, we have another group of village deities also standing against the background of a prabhavali embellished with flames. Their shoulder lines are aligned along the horizontal crossbar joining the two sides of the prabhavali.

83. Vasudev carrying new-born Krishna across the river Yamuna, Rajasthan. 19th century.

Another favourite theme of the painters has been attempted by the metalsmith of this bronze. This theme is rather unusual for bronzes. Curiously, the basket is formed of Ananta's coiled body and his hoods canopy and protect the divine babe from the heavy down-pour. The figure of Krishna, however, is much larger and one of his legs dangles in front to lower the level of the river Yamuna. Vasudev's body was seen only upto the waist, the rest being submerged in the river, the metalsmith has concentrated only on the upper part of his body. Probably such images were used for worship on the occasion of Krishna's birthday when it is customary in each and every home to commemorate episodes from Krishna's life. Possibly this image was kept in the water.

84-85. Tiger Head, Rajasthan or Maharashtra. 19th century.

Such three dimensional powerful emblems surmounted the standards used for religious processions.

86. Daksha's mask, Karnataka. Early 19th century.

Daksha was Shiva's hostile father-in-law. This image seems to have been inspired by the Kirttimukha masks and theatrical masks used in Andhra and South India. It must have been used as a wall plaque.

87. Devi Mask, Kulu, Himachal Pradesh. 16th century.

A high pinnacled diadem, third eye vertically inscribed on the forehead, the glow of benign smile radiating the divine face are the common features of most mohras (sometimes addressed as nakalis or saathis) of the Devi from Kulu. She is wearing circular ear studs and bead necklace, typical pahari ornaments. Two confronting snakes are seen under her breasts, forming a kind of necklace. How this form originated and what prompted the metalsmiths to cast these mohras in this manner—these questions have baffled many scholars and connoisseurs. These masks are known as mohra in pahari dialect, which literally means a mask. The two-dimensional form, in my daughter Subhashini's view, derives from the papier-mache masks of the Devi that are used on the occasion of the phagali fair celebrated in pahari villages all over the province of Himachal, in February-March when the ruralfolk get free from the harvest toils and also from rigorously chilly winter months. The slight let-up in the season urges them to give vent to their mirth by dancing, rejoicing, entertaining themselves by inventing humorous or didactic stories. The rich storehouse of Durga and Shiva legends, inspires them to re-enact the encounters of these deities with demons. For this purpose, masks are needed by the actors. Originally the masks were made of papier-mache or wood in this form and in the course of time came to be fashioned in metal. The flat lower portion was necessary to function as

support when these plaques are placed on the altars or hung up on the sedan chairs for religious processions. This portion is covered by silk garments. The face is cast in the round, for it is meant to be seen by the devotees. The inspiration for the form came from the theatrical masks. Another reason could be that the idol worshipped in the village temples cannot be removed. When images were required for processional purposes, the metalworkers focussed more attention and lavished greater care on the face of the deities whose darshan the villagers craved for and did not care to finish the rest of the image. The tradition is an ancient one and the earliest mohras date from the eighth-ninth centuries A.D.

88. Shiva mohra, Mandi, contemporary, made of sheet.

89-92. Devi mohras, 18th-19th century.

The small mohras (Pls. 89 and 90) look very primitive and were meant for household worship. The other specimens, while retaining the classical features--the pinnacled diadem, the third eye, etc.— are far more crude but forcefully executed. They are highly impressive.

93. Mukhalinga, Nasik, Maharashtra. 17th century.

Small and portable metal lingas such as this image were meant for personal worship. Instead of flat rounded top, here we have a horizontal bar on which are aligned the figures of Ganesh (left), lingam-yoni (centre) and Skanda or Karttikeya (right). Four faces of Shiva emerge in the four directions from its cylindrical shape. The coiffure and physiognomical features of each are alike. The faces appear as if they have emerged from the linga. There is no suggestion of their bodies. Similar mukhalingas in classical style have come down to us from Nepal.

94. Shaivite group, Maharashtra. 19th century.

Instead of congregating all the Shaivite symbols and deities within a square, they are arranged neatly on a bigger flat base. Four figures in two groups are separated by a trident and the symbols— Nandi, cobra and lingam-yoni—are depicted in front.

95. A female devotee with offerings and a horse-riding couple, Karnataka-Maharashtra. 19th century.

Sharp chiselled features distinguish the female figures with elaborate coiffures. Their inherent dynamism is shared by the male figure on horseback as well as the animal he is riding.

96 & 97. Seated rural deities, Probably Karnataka (South India) 18th and 19th century.

Seated on a high square pedestal are the village deities in a crossed-legs posture. Their high conical crowns rest on large roundish head, in contrast to which are their diminutive bodies ornamented with necklaces. The navels are emphasised by a large circle.

98. A rural female deity standing in anjali mudra. Himachal Pradesh. 17th century.

Devotion writ large on her face, this female deity stands with legs apart in anjali mudra. The large face is crowned by stylised loops and dots and a big eye is affixed on the forehead. The figure is vestigial. Her skirt is patterned.

99. Virabhadra, South India. 15th century.

A semi classical bronze, it features Virabhadra standing on a high pedestal against a prabhavali ornamented with spirals. Clad in a dhoti, sporting vanamala, the god displays classical features. A small figure of a devotee standing in anjali mudra is rather crude and folkish in sharp contrast to the principal figure.

100-101. Garuda images, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. 18th century.

The Kangra metalsmiths' vivacity is seen in these images, depicting Vishnu's vahana Garuda in human form with wings and the other in animal form with a curved beak. Kneeling in anjali mudra, paying homage to Lord Vishnu, both the images are masterpieces of metalworkers' craft. Both are sporting a typically pahari high pinnacled crown. The shaft at the top probably fitted into another form, possibly that of Vishnu. The pedestal in Pl. 100 is fashioned in the manner of a Tulsi shrine commonly seen in every pahari home. The Tulsi plant is symbolically associated with Vishnu.

102. Radha and Venu Gopal Krishna, Rajasthan-Gujarat. Late 18th century.

These accomplished images of the flute playing Krishna standing with one leg crossing over the other and his beloved Radha display tubular limbs and typical features that characterise Gujarati icons— simplified forms, prominent jawline, slender limbs, flowing ends of the drapery jutting out from both the thighs matched by the similar treatment of the kundalas, etc.

103. Cowherd Krishna leading the flock of cows. Rajasthan. Late 19th century.

A rather unusual theme for bronze icons. Perhaps the metalsmith was inspired by paintings or folk songs to depict the divine cowherd Krishna leading his flock of cows back home or out for pasturing in the morning. At the back is seen Balarama, his elder brother. All the figures are aligned on a flat base. This is a solitary image featuring this theme.

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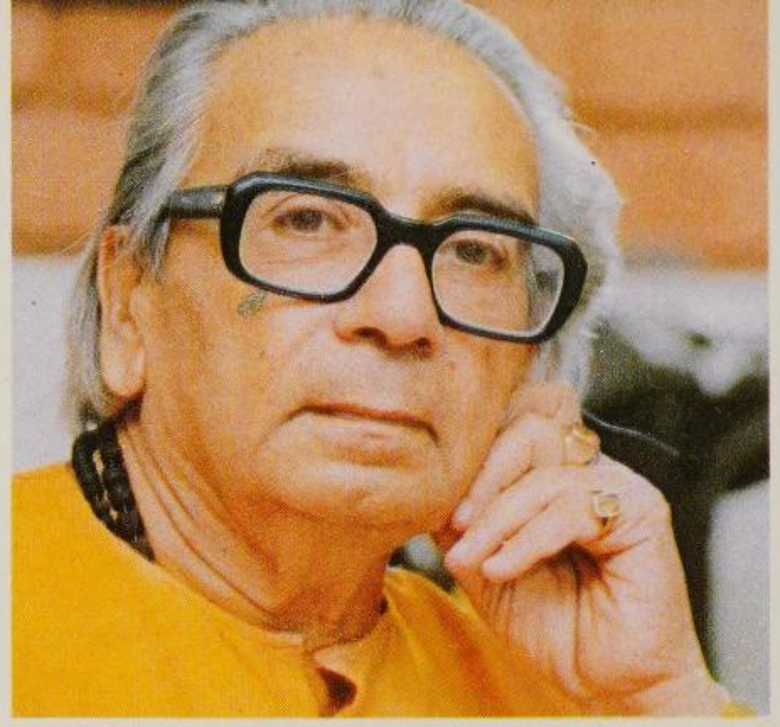


K.C. ARYAN (b. 1919), founder-director of Home of Folk Art, a museum of folk, tribal and neglected arts in Gurgaon, is basically a painter and sculptor. He is one of the few pioneers in the field of folk and tribal arts. His contribution to contemporary art is as valuable as to traditional arts. What is interesting is that he has displayed equally keen perception of all art forms and since the dawn of his career, he has been interweaving the modern and the traditional in his own way like a deft master. His keen interest in and awareness of the traditional impelled him to piece together an artistic history which would prove invaluable. He has several monographs to his credit published between 1952 and 1990 .

Rekha : an invaluable study of the Devanagari calligraphy. Folk Bronzes of North-Western India, Hanuman in Art and Mythology, 100 Years Survey of Punjab Painting (1841-1941), Punjab Murals, The Little Goddesses (Matrikas), Basis of Decorative Element in Indian Art, The Cultural Heritage of Punjab, 3000 BC-1947 AD, Rural Art of the Western Himalaya, Encyclopedia of Indian Art and Indian Folk Bronzes.

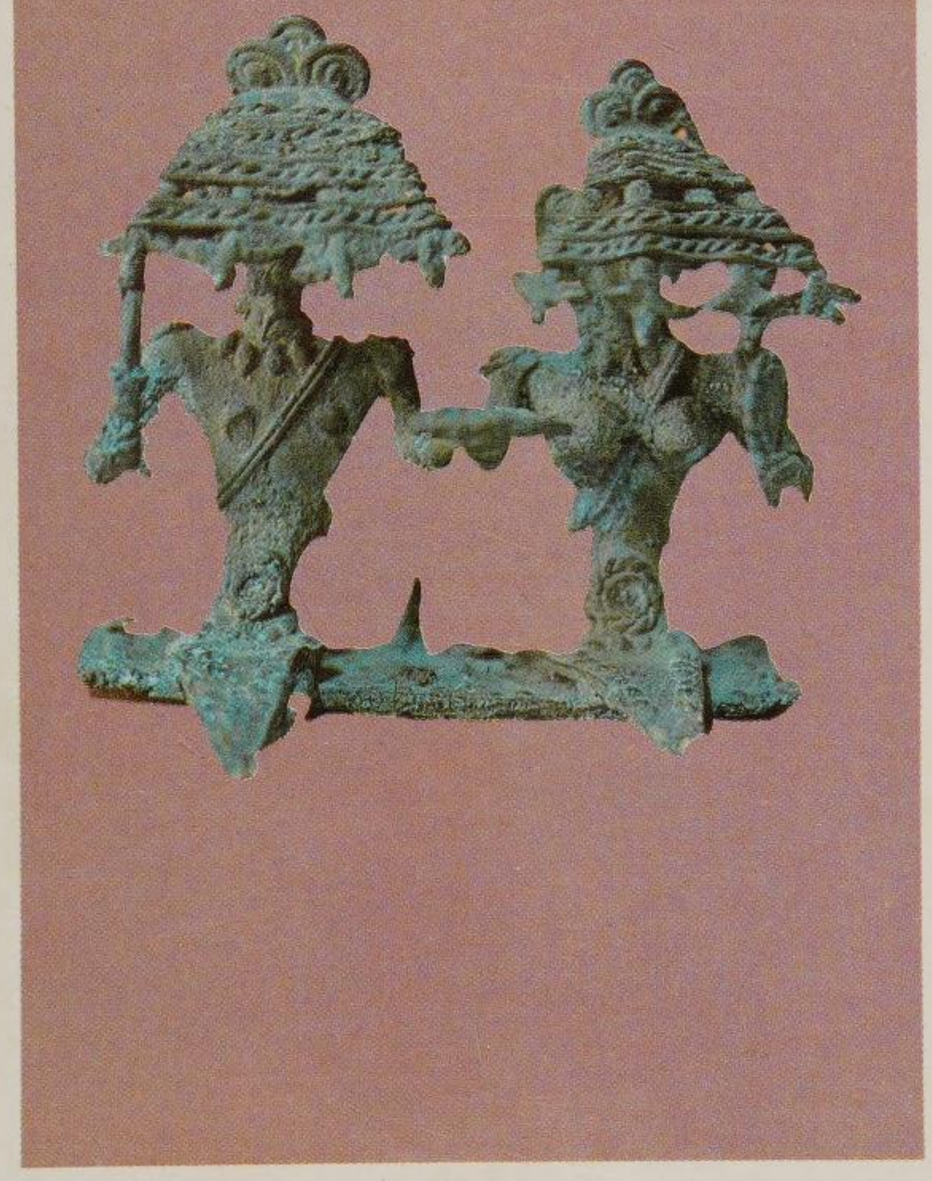
One thing is common to all these books — Aryan's desire to make known the unexplored material and this is what has been the motivating force behind all his efforts and achievements.

Aryan has travelled extensively all over India, especially the rural and tribal areas. He visited numerous countries abroad starting from Afghanistan and Iran, Asia Minor countries, Beirut, Lebanon to Europe, mainly Italy, France and England where he got an opportunity to fulfil some of his artistic dreams of visiting ancient archaeological-historical sites (especially in West Asia and Greece), of seeing the masterpieces of European art in the original and of meeting his conceptual guru F. Matania, R.I., an Italian illustrator, from whose work he derived inspiration for historical illustration.

Aryan is still active working with the same enthusiasm that has been his guiding spirit all through his life. At present he is engaged in a very ambitious, albeit controversial, project on The Vedic Aryans, which will be presented to our readers in not too distant a future.

BACK COVER :

An unusual depiction of bride and groom sitting with veiled faces, Bastar, 19th century.



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